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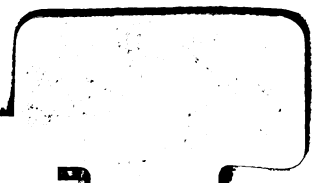
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THE

SHADOW OF ASHLYDYAT.

BY

Ellen Wood

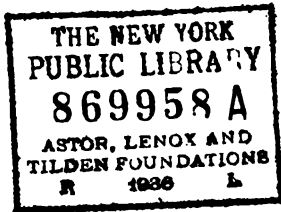
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"VERNER'S PRIDE," "THE CHANNINGS," "THE EARL'S HEIRS,"
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"EAST LYNNE," "THE MYSTERY," "THE LOST BANK
NOTE," "THE RUNAWAY MATCH," ETC.

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T H E

SHADOW OF ASHLYDYAT.

CHAPTER I.

THE MEET OF THE HOUNDS.

It was a bright day in autumn: the scene one of those fair ones rarely to be witnessed but in England. The sun, warm and glowing, almost befitting a summer's day, shone on the stubble of the corn-fields, whence the golden grain had recently been gathered, gilded the tops of the trees,—so soon to pass into the “sere and yellow leaf,”—illuminated the blue hills in the distance, and brought out the nearer features of the landscape in all their light and shade. A fine landscape, as you gazed at it from this high ground, where you may suppose yourself to be standing: comprising hill and dale, water and green pastures, woods and open plains. Amidst them rose the marks of busy life; mansions, cottages, hamlets, railways; and churches, whose steeples ascended high,—pointing the way to a better land.

The town of Prior's Ash, lying in a valley, was alive that gay morning with excitement. It was the day appointed for the first meet of the hounds,—the P. A. hounds, of some importance in the county,—and people from far and near were flocking to see them throw off. Old and young, gentle and simple, lords of the soil and tradesmen, all were wending their way to the place of meeting. The master, Colonel Max, was wont, on

this, the inaugurating morning of the season, to assemble at his house for breakfast as many as his large dining-room could by any species of crowding contain; and a fine sight it was, and drew forth its numerous spectators, to watch them come afterwards, in procession, to the meet. As many carriages-and-four, with their fair occupants, would come to that first meet, as you could have seen in the old days on a county race-course. It was an old-fashioned, local custom, this show; Col. Max was pleased to keep it up; and he lacked not supporters. The opening, this year, was unusually early.

The gay crowd was arriving, thick and threefold; some from the breakfast, some from their homes. The rendezvous was a wide, open common; no space lacking. The restrained hounds snarled away at a short distance, and their attendants, attired for the hunt, clashed their whips among them.

Riding a noble horse, and advancing from the opposite direction to that of Colonel Max and his guests, came a tall, stately man, getting in years. His features were regular as though they had been chiselled from marble; his fine blue eyes could sparkle yet; and his snow-white hair, wavy as of yore, was worn rather long behind, giving to him somewhat the appearance of a patriarch. But the healthy bloom, which had once been characteristic of his face, had left it now:

the paleness of ill-health sat there, and he bent his body continually, as if too weak to bear up on his horse. His approach was discerned; and many started forward, as with one impulse, to greet him. None stood higher in the estimation of his fellow-men than did Sir George Godolphin; no other name was more respected in the county.

"This is good indeed, Sir George! To see you out again!"

"I thought I might venture," said Sir George, essaying to meet a dozen hands at once. "It has been a long confinement; a tedious illness. Six months, and never out of the house; and, for the last fortnight out but in a garden-chair. My lady wanted to box me up in the carriage this morning,—if I must come, she said. But I would not have it: had I been unable to sit my horse, I would have remained at home."

"You feel weak still?" remarked one, after most of the greeters had had their say, and were moving away.

"Ay. Strength, for me, has finally departed, I fear."

"But you must not think that, Sir George. Now that you are so far recovered as to go out, you will improve daily."

"And get well all one way, Godolphin," joined in the hearty voice of Colonel Max. "Never lose heart, man."

Sir George turned his eyes upon Colonel Max with a cheerful glance. "Who told you I was losing heart?"

"Yourself. When a man begins to talk of his strength having finally departed, what's that but a proof of his losing heart? Low spirits never cured anybody yet: but they have killed thousands."

"I shall be sixty-six years old to-morrow, colonel: and if, at that age, I can 'lose heart' at the prospect of the great change, my life has served me to little purpose. The young may faint at the near approach of death; the old should not."

"Sixty-six, old!" ejaculated Colonel Max. "I have never kept count

of my own age, but I know I am that, if I am a day; and I am young yet. I may live these thirty years to come: and shall try for it, too."

"I hope you will, colonel," was the warm answer of Sir George Godolphin. "Prior's Ash could ill spare you."

"I don't know about that," laughed the colonel. "But I do know that I could ill spare life. I wish you could take the run with us this morning!"

"I wish I could. But that you might accuse me again of—what was it?—losing heart, I would say that my last run with the hounds has been taken. It has cost me an effort to come so far as this, walking my horse at a snail's-pace. Do you see Lady Godolphin? She ought to be here."

Colonel Max, who was a short man, raised himself in his stirrups, and gazed from point to point of the gradually-increasing crowd. "In her carriage, I suppose?"

"In her carriage, of course," answered Sir George. "She is no Amazon." But he did not avow his reason for inquiring after his wife's carriage,—that he felt a giddiness stealing over him, and deemed he might be glad of its support. Neither did he explain that he was unable to look round for it himself just then, under fear of falling from his horse.

"I don't think she has come yet," said Colonel Max. "I do not see the livery. As to the ladies, they all look so like one another now, with their furbelows and feathers, that I'll be shot if I should know my own wife—if I had one—at a dozen paces' distance. Here is some one else, however."

"Riding up quietly, and reining-in at the side of Sir George, was a gentleman of middle height, with dark hair, dark-gray eyes, and a quiet, pale countenance. In age he may have wanted some three or four years of forty, and a casual observer might have pronounced him "insignificant," and never have cast on him a second glance. But there was a certain attraction in his face, for all that; and

his voice sounded wonderfully sweet and kind as he grasped the hand of Sir George.

"My dear father! I am so glad to see you here!"

"And surprised too, I conclude, Thomas," returned Sir George, smiling on his son. "Come close to me, will you, and let me rest my arm upon your shoulder for a minute. I feel somewhat giddy."

"Should you have ventured out on horseback?" inquired Thomas Godolphin, as he hastened to place himself in proximity with his father.

"The air will do me good; and the exertion also. It is nothing to feel a little weak after a confinement such as mine has been. You don't follow the hounds to-day, I see, Thomas," continued Sir George, noting his son's plain costume.

A smile crossed Thomas Godolphin's lips. "No, sir. I rarely do follow them. I leave amusement for George."

"Is he here, that graceless George?" demanded the knight, searching into the crowd with fond and admiring eyes. But the admiring eyes did not see the object they thought to rest on.

"He is sure to be here, sir. I have not seen him."

"And your sisters? Are they here?"

"No. They did not care to come."

"Speak for Janet and Cecil, if you please, Thomas," interrupted a young lady's voice at this juncture. The knight looked down; his son looked down: there stood the second daughter of the family, Bessy Godolphin. She was a dark, quick, active little woman of thirty, with an ever-ready tongue, and deep-gray eyes.

"Bessy!" uttered Sir George, in astonishment. "Have you come here on foot?"

"Yes, papa. Thomas asked us whether we wished to see the meet; and Janet—who must be master and mistress always, you know—answered that we did not. Cecil dutifully agreed with her. I did care to see it; so I came alone."

"But, Bessy, why did you not say so?" remonstrated Mr. Godolphin. "You should have ordered the carriage; you should not have come on foot. What will people think?"

"Think!" she echoed, holding up her pleasant face to her brother, in its saucy independence. "They can think any thing they please: I am Bessy Godolphin. I wonder how many scores have come on foot?"

"None, Bessy, in your degree, who have carriages to sit in, or horses to ride," said Sir George.

"Papa, I like to use my legs better than to have them cramped under a habit or in a carriage; and you know I never could bow to fashion and form," she laughed. "Dear papa, I am delighted to see you! I was so thankful when I heard you were here! Janet will be fit to eat her own head now, for not coming."

"Who told you I was here, Bessy?"

"Old Jekyl. He was leaning on his palings as I came by, and called out the information to me almost before I could hear: 'The master's gone to it, Miss Bessy! he is out once again! But he had not got on his scarlet,' the old fellow added; and his face lost its gladness. Papa, the whole world is delighted that you should have recovered, and be once more amongst them."

"Not quite recovered yet, Bessy. Getting better, though; getting better. Thank you, Thomas; the faintness has passed."

"Is not Lady Godolphin here, papa?"

"She must be here by this time. I wish I could see her carriage: you must get into it."

"I did not come for that, papa," returned quick Bessy, with a touch of her warm temper.

"My dear, I wish you to join her. I do not like to see you here on foot."

"I shall set the fashion, papa," laughed Bessy, again. "At the great meet next year, you will see half the stylish pretenders of the county toiling here on their two feet. I say I am Bessy Godolphin."

The knight ranged his eyes over the motley group, but he could not discern his wife. Sturdy, bluff old fox-hunters were there in plenty, and well got-up young gentlemen, all on horseback, their white cords and their scarlet coats gleaming in the sun. Ladies were mostly in carriages; a few were mounted, who would ride quietly home again when the hounds had thrown off; a very few—they might be counted by units—would follow the field. Prior's Ash and its neighborhood was supplied in a very limited degree with what they were pleased to call masculine women: for, the term "fast" had not then come in. Many a pretty woman, many a pretty girl was present, and the sportsmen lingered, and were well pleased to linger, in the sunshine of their charms, ere the business, for which they had come out, began, and they should throw themselves, heart and energy, into it.

On the outskirts of the crowd, sitting her horse well, was a handsome girl of right regal features and black flashing eyes. Above the ordinary height of woman, she was finely formed, her waist slender, her shoulders beautifully modelled. She wore a peculiar dress, and, from that cause alone, many eyes were on her. A well-fitting habit of bright grass-green, ornamented on the corsage with buttons of silver-gilt; similar buttons were also on the sleeves at the wrist, but they were partially hidden by her white gauntlets. A cap, grass-green, rested on the upper part of her forehead, a green-and-gold feather on its left side, which glittered as the sun's rays played upon it. It was a style of dress which had not yet been seen at Prior's Ash, and was regarded with some doubt. But, as you are aware, it is not a dress in itself which is condemned or extolled: it depends upon who it is that wears it: and, as the young lady, wearing this, was just now the fashion at Prior's Ash, the feather and habit were taken into favor forthwith. She could have worn none more adapted to her peculiar style of beauty.

Bending to his very saddle's bow, as he talked to her,—for, though she was tall, he was taller still,—was a gentleman of courtly mien. In his fine upright figure, his fair complexion and wavy hair, his good features and dark blue eyes, might be traced a strong resemblance to Sir George Godolphin. But the lips had a more ready smile upon them than Sir George's had ever worn, for his had always been somewhat of the sternest; the blue eyes twinkled with a gayer and more suspicious light, when gazing into other eyes, than could ever have been charged upon Sir George: but the bright complexion had been Sir George's once: imparting to his face, as it now did to his son's, a delicate beauty, almost as that of woman. "Graceless George," old Sir George was fond of calling him; but it was an appellation given in love, in pride, in admiration. He bent to his saddle-bow, and his gay blue eyes flashed with unmistakable admiration into those black ones as he talked to the lady: and the black ones most certainly flashed the admiration back again. Dangerous eyes, were those of Charlotte Pain's! And not altogether lovable ones.

"Do you always keep your promises like you kept that one yesterday?" she was asking him.

"I did not make a promise yesterday,—that I remember. Had I made one to you, I should have kept it."

"Fickle and faithless!" she cried. "Men's promises are lasting as words traced upon the sea-side sand. When you met me yesterday in the carriage with Mrs. Verrall, and she asked you to take compassion on two forlorn dames and come in to Ashlydyat in the evening, and dissipate our ennui, what was your answer?"

"That I would, if it were possible."

"Was nothing more explicit implied?"

George Godolphin laughed. Perhaps his conscience told him that he had implied more, in a certain pressure he remembered giving to that fair hand, which was resting now,

gauntleted, upon her reins. Gay George had meant to dissipate Ashlydyat's ennui, if nothing more tempting offered. But something more tempting did offer: and he had spent the evening in the company of one who was more to him than was Charlotte Pain.

"An unavoidable engagement arose, Miss Pain. Otherwise you may rely upon it I should have been at Ashlydyat."

"Unavoidable!" she replied, her eyes gleaming with something very like anger into those which smiled on her. "I know what your engagement was. You were at Lady Godolphin's Folly."

"Right. Commanded to it by my father."

"Oh!"

"Solicited, if not absolutely commanded," he continued. "And a wish from Sir George now bears its weight: we may not have him very long with us."

A smile of mockery, pretty and fascinating to look upon, played upon her rich red lips. "It is edifying to hear these filial sentiments expressed by Mr. George Godolphin! Take your care, sir, to act up to them."

"Do you think I need the injunction? How shall I make my peace with you?"

"By coming to Ashlydyat some other evening while the present moon lasts. I mean, while it illumines the early part of the evening."

She dropped her voice to a low key, and her tone had changed to seriousness. George Godolphin looked at her in surprise.

"What is the superstition?" she continued to whisper, "that attaches to Ashlydyat?"

"Why do you ask me this?" he hastily said.

"Because, yesterday evening, when I was sitting on that seat underneath the ash-trees, watching the road from Lady Godolphin's Folly,—well, watching for you, if you like it better: but I can assure you there is nothing in the avowal that need excite your

vanity, as I see it is doing. When a gentleman makes a promise, I expect him to keep it; and, looking upon your coming as a matter of course, I did watch for you; as I might watch for one of Mrs. Verrall's servants, had I sent him on an errand and expected his return."

"Thank you," laughed George Godolphin. "But suffer my vanity to rest in abeyance for a while, will you, and go on with what you were saying?"

"Are you a convert to the superstition?" she inquired, disregarding the request.

"N—o," replied George Godolphin. But his voice sounded strangely indecisive. "Pray continue, Charlotte."

It was the first time he had ever called her by her Christian name: and though she saw that it was but done in the unconscious excitement of the moment, her cheeks flushed with a deeper crimson.

"Did you ever see the shadow?" she breathed.

He bowed his head.

"What form does it take?"

George Godolphin did not answer. He appeared lost in thought, as he scored his horse's neck with his hunting-whip.

"The form of a bier on which rests something covered with a pall, that may be supposed to be a coffin; with a mourner at the head and at the foot?" she whispered.

He bowed his head again: very gravely.

"Then I saw it last night. I did indeed. I was sitting underneath the ash-trees, and I saw a strange shadow in the moonlight that I had never seen before—"

"Where?" he interrupted.

"In that wild-looking part of the grounds as you look across from the ash-trees. Just in front of the archway, where the ground is bare. It was there. Mr. Verrall says he wonders Sir George does not have those gorse-bushes cleared away, and the ground converted into civilized land, like the rest."

"It has been done, but the bushes grow again."

"Well, I was sitting there, and I saw this unusual shadow. It arrested my eye at once. Where did it come from? I wondered: what cast it? I never thought of the Ashlydyat superstition; never for a moment. I only thought what a strange appearance the shadow wore. I thought of a lying-in-state; I thought of a state-funeral, where the coffin rests on a bier, and a mourner sits at the head and a mourner at the foot. Shall I tell you," she suddenly broke off, "what the scene altogether looked like?"

"Do so."

"Like a graveyard. They may call it the Dark Plain! The shadow might be taken for a huge tomb, with two images weeping over it, and the bushes, around, assumed the form of lesser ones. Some, square; some, long; some, high; some, low; but all looking not unlike graves in the moonlight."

"Moonlight shadows are apt to bear fanciful forms to a vivid imagination, Miss Pain," he lightly said.

"Have not others indulged the same fancy before me? I remember to have heard so."

"As they have said. They never took the form to my sight," he observed, with a half-smile of ridicule. "When I know bushes to be bushes, I cannot, by any stretch of imagination, magnify them into graves. You must have had this Ashlydyat nonsense in your head."

"I have assured you that I had not. It was only after I had been regarding it for some time,—and the longer I looked the plainer the shadow seemed to grow,—that I thought of the Ashlydyat tale. All in an instant the truth flashed upon me,—that it must be the apparition—"

"The *what*, Miss Pain?"

"Does the word offend you? It is a foolish one. The shadow, then. I remembered that the shadow, so dreaded by the Godolphins, did take the form of a bier with mourners weeping at it—"

"Was said to take it," he interposed, in a tone of quiet reproof: "that would be the better phrase. And, in speaking of the shadow being dreaded by the Godolphins, you allude, I presume, to the Godolphins of the past ages. I know of none in the present who dread it: save superstitious Janet."

"How touchy you are upon the point!" she laughed. "Do you know, George Godolphin, that that very touchiness betrays the fact that you, for one, are not exempt from the dread. "And," she added, changing her tone again to one of serious sympathy, "did not the dread help to kill Mrs. Godolphin?"

"No," he gravely answered. "If you give ear to all the stories that the old wives of the neighborhood love to indulge in, you will collect a valuable stock of fable-lore."

"Let it pass. If I repeated the fable, it was because I had heard it. But, now you will understand why I felt vexed last night when you did not come. It was not for your sweet company I was pining, as your vanity has been assuming, but that I wanted you to see the shadow. How that girl is fixing her eyes upon us!"

George Godolphin turned at the last sentence, which was uttered abruptly. An open barouche had drawn up, and its occupants, two ladies, were both looking towards them. The one was a young girl, with a pale, gentle face and dark eyes, as remarkable for their refined sweetness, as Miss Pain's were for their brilliancy. The other was a little lady of middle age, dressed youthfully, and whose naturally fair complexion was so excessively soft and clear, as to give a suspicion that nature had less hand in it than art. It was Lady Godolphin. She held her eye-glass to her eye, and turned it on the crowd.

"Maria, whatever is that on horse-back? It looks green."

"It is Charlotte Pain in a grass-green riding-habit."

"A grass-green riding-habit! And

her head seems to glitter! Has she any thing in her cap?"

"It appears to be a gold feather."

"She must look beautiful! Very handsome, does she not?"

"For those who admire her style—very," replied Maria Hastings.

Which was certainly not the style of Maria Hastings. Quiet, retiring, gentle, she could only wonder at those who dressed in bright-colored habits with gold buttons and feathers, and followed the hounds over ditches and gates. Miss Hastings wore a pretty, white-silk bonnet, and grey Cashmere mantle. Nothing could be plainer; but then, she was a clergyman's daughter.

"It is on these occasions that I regret my deficiency of sight," said Lady Godolphin. "Who is that, in scarlet, talking to her? It is like the figure of George Godolphin."

"It is he," said Maria. "He is coming towards us."

He was piloting his horse through the throng, returning greetings from everybody: a universal favorite was George Godolphin. Charlotte Pain's fine eyes were following him with somewhat dimmed brilliancy: he was not so entirely hers as she could wish to see him.

"How are you this morning, Lady Godolphin?" But it was on the hand of Maria Hastings that his own lingered: and her cheeks took the hue of Charlotte Pain's, as he bent low to whisper words that were all too dear.

"George, do you know that your father is here?" said Lady Godolphin.

George, in his surprise, drew himself upright on his horse. "My father here! Is he indeed?"

"Yes; and on horseback. Very unwise of him; but he would not be persuaded from it. It was a sudden resolution that he appeared to take: I suppose the fineness of the morning tempted him. Miss Maria Hastings, what nonsense has George been saying to you? Your face is as red as his coat"

"That is what I was saying to her," laughed George Godolphin. "Asking her where her cheeks had borrowed their roses from."

A parting of the crowd brought Sir George Godolphin within view, and the family drew together in a group. Up went Lady Godolphin's glass again.

"Is that Bessy? My dear, with whom did you come?"

"I came by myself, Lady Godolphin. I walked."

"Oh dear!" uttered Lady Godolphin. "You do the wildest things, Bessy! And Sir George allows you to do them!"

"Sir George does not," spoke the knight. "Sir George had already desired her to take her place in the carriage. Open the door, James."

Bessy laughed as she stepped into it. She cheerfully obeyed her father; but any thing like ceremony, or, as the world may call it, etiquette, she waged war with.

"I expected to meet your sisters here, Bessy," said Lady Godolphin. "I want you all to dine with me to-day. We must celebrate the first going out of your father. You will bear the invitation to them."

"Certainly," said Bessy. "We shall be happy to come. I know Janet has no engagement."

"An early dinner, mind: five o'clock. Sir George cannot wait."

"To dine at supper-time," chimed in unfashionable Bessy. "George, do you hear? Lady Godolphin's, at five."

A movement; a rush; a whirl. The hounds were preparing to throw off, and the field was gathering. George Godolphin hastily quitted the side of Miss Hastings, though he found time for a stolen whisper.

"Fare you well, my dearest."

And, when she next saw him, after the noise and the confusion had cleared away, he was galloping in the wake of the baying pack, side by side with Charlotte Pain.

CHAPTER II.

LADY GODOLPHIN'S FOLLY.

PRIOR'S ASH was not a large town, though of some importance in country estimation. In the days of the monks, when all good people were Roman Catholics, or professed to be, it had been but a handful of houses, which various necessities had caused to spring up around the priory: a flourishing and crowded establishment of religious men then; a place marked but by a few ruins now. In process of time the handful of houses had increased to several handfuls, the handfuls to a village, and the village to a borough town; still retaining the name bestowed on it by the monks,—“Prior's Ash.”

In the heart of the town was situated the banking-house of Godolphin, Crosse, and Godolphin. It was an old-established and most respected firm, sound and wealthy. The third partner and second Godolphin, mentioned in it, was Thomas Godolphin, Sir George Godolphin's eldest son. Until he joined it, it had been Godolphin and Crosse. It was a matter of arrangement, understood by Mr. Crosse, that when any thing happened to Sir George, Thomas would step into his father's place, as the firm's head, and George, whose name at present did not appear, though he had been long in the bank, would represent the last name: so that it would still remain Godolphin, Crosse, and Godolphin. Mr. Crosse, who, like Sir George, was getting in years, was remarkable for nothing but a close attention to business. He was a widower, without children, and Prior's Ash wondered who would be the better for the filling of his garners.

The Godolphins could trace themselves back to the ages of the monks. But of no very high ancestry boasted they; no titles, places, or honors; they ranked amongst the landed gentry as owners of Ashlydyat, and that was all. It was quite enough for them: to be lords of Ashlydyat was

an honor they would not have bartered for a kingdom's dukedom. They held by Ashlydyat. It was their pride, their stronghold, their boast: had feudal times been in fashion now, they would have dug a moat around it, and fenced it in with fortifications, and called it their castle. Why did they so love it? It was but a poor place, at best, nothing to look at; and, in the matter of space inside, was somewhat straightened. Oak-panell-ed rooms, dark as mahogany, garrisoned with cross beams, low ceilings and mullioned windows, are not the most consonant to modern taste. People thought that the Godolphins loved it from its associations and traditions,—from the very fact that certain superstitions attached to it. Foolish superstitions, you will be inclined to call them, as contrasted with the enlightenment of these matter-of-fact days,—I had almost said these days of materialism.

Ashlydyat was not entailed. There was a clause in the old deeds of tenure which prevented it. A wicked Godolphin (by which complimentary appellation his descendants distinguished him) had cut off the entail, and gambled the estate away; and though the Godolphins got it back again in the course of one or two lives, the entail was not renewed. It was now bequeathed from father to son, and was always the residence of the reigning Godolphin. Thomas Godolphin knew that it would become his on the death of his father, as surely as if he were the heir by entail. The late Mr. Godolphin, Sir George's father, had lived and died in it. Sir George succeeded, and then *he* lived in it,—with his wife and children. But he was not Sir George then: therefore, for a few minutes, while speaking of this part of his life, we will call him what he was,—Mr. Godolphin. A pensive, thoughtful woman was Mrs. Godolphin, never too strong in health. She was Scotch by birth. Of her children, Thomas and Janet mostly resembled her; Bessy was like nobody but herself; George and Cecil inher-

ted the beauty of their father. There was considerable difference in the ages of the children, for they had numbered thirteen. Thomas was the eldest, Ceel the youngest; Janet, Bessy, and George were between them; and the rest, who had also been between them, had died, mostly infants. But, a moment yet, to give a word to the description of Ashlydyat, before speaking of the death of Mrs. Godolphin.

Passing out of Prior's Ash towards the west, a turning to the left of the high-road took you to Ashlydyat. Built of grey stone, and lying somewhat in a hollow, it wore altogether a gloomy appearance. And it was intensely ugly. A low building of two stories, irregularly built, with gables and nooks and ins-and-outs of corners, and a square turret in the middle, which was good for nothing but the birds to build on. It wore a time-honored look, though, with all its ugliness, and the moss grew, green and picturesque, on its walls. Perhaps on the principle, or, let us say, by the subtle instinct of nature, that a mother loves a deformed child with a deeper affection than she feels for her other children, who are fair, and sound of limb, did the Godolphins feel pride in their inheritance because it was ugly. But the grounds around it were beautiful, and the landscape, so much of it as could be seen from that unelevated spot, most fair to look upon. A full view might be obtained from the rooms in the turret, though it was somewhat of a mount to get to them. Dark groves, and bright, undulating lawns, shady spots where the water rippled, pleasant to bask in on a summer's day, sunny parterres of gay flowers, scenting the air; charming, indeed, were the environs of Ashlydyat. All, save one spot: and that had charms also for some minds,—sombre ones.

In one part of the grounds there grew a vast quantity of ash-trees,—and it was supposed, though not known, that these trees may originally have suggested the name, Ashlydyat,—as they most certainly had

that of Prior's Ash, given to the village by the monks. As the village had swollen into a town, the ash-trees, growing there, were cleared away as necessity required; but the town was surrounded with them still.

Opposite to the ash-trees on the estate of Ashlydyat there extended a waste plain, totally out of keeping with the high cultivation around. It looked like a piece of rude common. Bushes of furze, broom, and other stunted shrubs grew upon it, none of them rising above the height of a two-year-old child. The description given by Charlotte Pain to George Godolphin was not an inapt one,—that the place, with these stunted bushes on it, looked, in the moonlight, not unlike a graveyard. At the extremity, opposite to the ash-trees, there rose a high archway, a bridge built of grey stone. It appeared to have formed part of an ancient fortification, but there was no trace of water having run underneath it. Beyond the archway, was a low, round building, like an isolated windmill without sails. It was built of grey stone also, and was called the belfry: though there were as little signs of bells ever having been in it, as there was of water beneath the bridge. The archway had been kept from decay; the belfry had not, but was open in places to the heavens.

Strange to say, the appellation of this waste piece of land, with its wild bushes, was the "Dark Plain." Why? The plain was not dark: it was not shaded: it stood out, open and broad, in the full glare of the sunlight. That certain dark tales had been handed down with the appellation, is true: and these may have given rise to the name. Immediately before the archway, for some considerable space, the ground was entirely bare. Not a blade of grass, not a shrub grew on it. Or, as the story went, *would* grow. It was on this spot that the appearance, the shadow, as mentioned by Charlotte Pain, would be sometimes seen. Whence the shadow came, whether it was ghostly or earthly,

whether those, learned in science and philosophy, could account for it by Nature's laws, whether it was cast by any gaseous vapor arising in the moonbeams, I am unable to say. If you ask me to explain it, I cannot; if you ask, why then do I write about it, I can only answer, because I have seen it. I have seen it with my own unprejudiced eyes: I have sat and watched it, in its strange stillness; I have looked about and around it, low down, up high, for some substance, ever so infinitesimal, that might cast its shade and enable me to account for it; and I have looked in vain. Had the moon been behind the archway, instead of behind *me*, that might have furnished a loophole of explanation; a very poor and inefficient loophole; a curious one also; for how can an archway in the substance be a bier and two mourners in its shadow? but, still, better than none.

No; there was nothing whatever, so far as human eyes—and I can tell you that keen ones and skeptical ones have looked at it—to cast the shade, or to account for it. There as you sat and watched, stretched out the plain in the moonlight, with its low, tomb-like bushes, its clear space of bare land, with the archway rising behind. But, on the spot of bare land, before the archway, would rise the shadow; not looking as if it were a shadow cast upon the ground, but a palpable fact: as if a bier, with its two bending mourners, actually stood there in the substance. I say that I cannot explain it, or attempt to explain it; but I do say that there it was to be seen. Not often: sometimes not for years together. It was called the Shadow of Ashlydyat: and superstition told that its appearance foreshadowed the approach of calamity, whether of death or other evil, to the Godolphins. The greater the evil that was coming upon them, the plainer and more distinct would be the appearance of the shadow,—the longer the space of time that it would be observed. Rumor went, that once, on the approach of some terrible mis-

fortune, it had been seen for months and months previously, whenever the moon was sufficiently bright. The Godolphins did not care to have the subject mentioned to them; in their skeptical atheism, they (some of them, at least) treated it with ridicule, or else with silence. But, like disbelievers of a different sort, the atheism was more in profession than in heart. The Godolphins, in their inmost soul, could cower at the appearance of that shadowed bier; as those others have been known to cower, in their loud anguish, at the approach of the shadow of death.

This was not all the superstition attaching to Ashlydyat: but you will probably deem this quite enough for the present. And we have to return to Mrs. Godolphin.

Five years before the present time, when pretty Cecil was in her fifteenth year, and most needed the guidance of a mother, Mrs. Godolphin died. Her illness had been of a lingering nature; little of hope in it from the first. It was towards the latter period of her illness that what had been regarded by four-fifths of Prior's Ash as an absurd child's tale, a superstition unworthy the notice of the present-day men and women, grew to be talked of in whispers, as something "strange." For three months antecedent to the death of Mrs. Godolphin, the Shadow of Ashlydyat was to be seen every light night, and all Pryor's Ash flocked up to look at it. That they went, is of no consequence; they had their walk and their gaze for their pains: but that Mrs. Godolphin should have been told of it, was. She was in the grounds alone one balmy moonlight night, later than she ought to have been, and she discerned people walking in them, making for the ash-trees.

"What can those people be doing here?" she exclaimed to one of her servants, who was returning to Ashlydyat from executing an errand in the town.

"It is to see the shadow, ma'am," whispered the girl, in answer, with

more of straightforward truth than prudence.

Mrs. Godolphin paused. "The shadow!" she uttered. "Is the shadow to be seen?"

"It has been there ever since last moon, ma'am. It never was so plain, they say."

Mrs. Godolphin waited her opportunity, and, when the intruders had dispersed, proceeded to the ash-trees. It is as well to observe that these ash-trees, and also the Dark Plain, though very near to the house, were not in the more private portion of the grounds.

Mrs. Godolphin proceeded to the ash-trees. An hour afterwards, her absence from the house was discovered, and they went out to search. It was her husband who found her. She pointed to the shadow, and spoke.

"You will believe that my death is coming on quickly now, George." But Mr. Godolphin turned it off with an attempt at joke, and told her she was old enough to know better.

Mrs. Godolphin died. Two years subsequently, Mr. Godolphin came in contact with a wealthy young widow; young, as compared with himself: Mrs. Campbell. He met her in Scotland, at the residence of his first wife's friends. She was English born, but her husband had been Scotch. Mr. Godolphin married her, and brought her to Ashlydyat. The step did not give pleasure to his children. When sons and daughters are of the age that the Godolphins were, a new wife, brought home to rule, rarely does give pleasure to the first family. Things did not go on very comfortably: there were faults on each side,—on that of Mrs. Godolphin, and on that of her step-daughters. After a while, a change was made. Thomas Godolphin and his sisters went to reside in the house attached to the bank,—a handsome modern residence, hitherto occupied by Mr. Crosse. "You had better come here," that gentleman had said to them: he was no stranger to the unpleasantness at Ashlydyat. "I will take up my abode in the country,"

he continued. "I would prefer to do so. I am getting to feel older than I did twenty years ago, and country air may renovate me." The arrangement was carried out. Thomas Godolphin and his three sisters entered upon their residence in Prior's Ash: Janet acting as mistress of the house, and as chaperone to her sisters. She was then past thirty: a sad, thoughtful woman, who lived much in the inward life.

Just about the time of this change, certain doings of local and public importance were enacted in the neighborhood, in which Mr. Godolphin took a prominent share. There ensued a proposal to knight him. He started from it with aversion. His family started also: they and he alike despised these mushroom honors. Not so Mrs. Godolphin. From the moment that the first word of the plan was breathed to her, she determined that it should be carried out; for the appellation, my lady, was as very incense in her ears. In vain Mr. Godolphin strove to argue with her: her influence was in the ascendant, and he lay under the spell. At length he yielded; and, though hot war waged in his heart, he bent his haughty knee at the court of St. James's, and rose up Sir George.

"After a storm comes a calm." A proverb pleasant to remember in some of the sharp storms of life. Mrs. Godolphin had carried her point, it being too many for her step-daughters; she had triumphed over opposition and become my lady; and now she settled down in calmness at Ashlydyat. But she grew dissatisfied. She was a woman who had no resources within herself, who lived but in excitement, and Ashlydyat's quietness overwhelmed her with ennui. She did not join in the love of the Godolphins for Ashlydyat. Mr. Godolphin, ere he had brought her home to it, a bride, had spoken so warmly of the place, in his attachment to it, that she had believed she was about to step into some modern paradise: instead of which, she found, as she expressed it,

a "cranky old house, full of nothing but passages." The dislike she formed for it, in that early moment, never was overcome.

She would beguile her husband to her own pretty place in Berwickshire; and, just at first, he was willing to be beguiled: but after he became Sir George (not that the title had any thing to do with it) public local business grew upon him, and he found it inconvenient to quit Ashlydyat. He explained this to Lady Godolphin: and said their sojourn in Scotland must be confined to an autumn visit. So she perforce dragged out her days at Ashlydyat, idle and listless.

We warn our children that idleness is the root of all evil; that it will infallibly lead into mischief any who indulge in it. It so led Lady Godolphin. One day, as she was looking from her drawing-room windows, wishing all sorts of things—that she lived in her pleasant home in Berwickshire; that she could live amidst the gayeties of London; that Ashlydyat was not such a horrid old place; that it was more modern and less ugly; that its reception-rooms were of lofty height, and garnished with gilding and glitter, instead of being low, gloomy, and grim; that it was situated on an eminence, instead of a flat, so that a better view of the lovely scenery around might be obtained. On that gentle rise, opposite, for instance—what would be more enchanting than to enjoy a constant view from that? If Ashlydyat could be transported there, like they carry out wooden houses to set up abroad; or, if only that one room, she then stood in, could, with its windows—

Lady Godolphin's thoughts arrested themselves here. An idea had flashed over her. Why should she not build a pretty summer-house on that hill; a pavilion? The Countess of Cavemore, in this very county, had done such a thing: had built a pavilion on a Lill within view of the windows of Cavemore House, and had called it "Lady Cavemore's Folly." But the previous week she, Lady Godolphin,

in driving by it, had thought what a pretty place it looked; what a charming prospect must be obtained from it. Why should she not do the same?

The idea grew into shape and form. It would not leave her again. She had plenty of money of her own, and she would work out her "Folly" to the very top of its bent.

To the top of its bent, indeed! None can tell what a thing will grow into when it is first begun. Lady Godolphin made known her project to Sir George, who, though he saw no particular need for the work, did not object to it: if Lady Godolphin chose to spend money in that way, she might. So it was put in hand. Architects, builders, decorators were called together; and the Folly was planned out and begun. Lady Godolphin had done with ennui now: she found employment for her days, in watching over the progress of the pavilion.

It is said that the consummation of our schemes generally brings its share of disappointment. It did so in this instance to Lady Godolphin. The Folly turned out to be a really pretty place; the views from its windows magnificent; and Lady Godolphin was as enchanted as a child is with a new toy. The disappointment arose from the fact that she could not make the Folly her home. After spending a morning in it, or an evening, she must quit it to return to that grey Ashlydyat,—the only eyesore to be seen, when looking from the Folly's windows. If a day turned out wet, she could not walk to the Folly; if she was expecting visitors, she must stay at home to receive them; if Sir George felt ill,—and his health was then beginning to suffer,—she could not quit him for her darling Folly. It was darling because it was new; in six-months' time, Lady Godolphin would have grown tired of it; have rarely entered it: but, in her present mood, it was all-in-all.

Slowly she formed the resolution to enlarge the Folly—slowly for her, for she deliberated upon it two whole days. She would add "a reception-

room or two," "a bed-room or two," "a kitchen," so that she might be enabled, when she chose, to take up her abode in it for a week. And these additions were begun.

But they did not end,—did not end as she had intended them. As the Folly grew, so grew the ideas of Lady Godolphin: there must be a suite of reception-rooms, there must be several bed-rooms, there must be domestic offices in proportion. Sir George told her that she would spend a fortune; my lady answered that, at any rate, she should have something to show for the outlay.

At length it was completed; and Lady Godolphin's Folly—for it retained its appellation—stood out to the view of Pryor's Ash, which it overlooked; to the view of Ashlydyat; to the view of the country generally, as a fair, moderate-sized, attractive residence, built in the villa style, its white walls dazzling the eye when the sun shone upon them.

"We will reside there, and let Ashlydyat," said Lady Godolphin to her husband.

"Reside at the Folly! Leave Ashlydyat!" he repeated, in consternation. "It could not be."

"It will be," she answered, with a half self-willed, half-caressing laugh. "Why could it not be?"

Sir George fell into a reverie. He admired the modern conveniences of the Folly, greatly admired the lovely scenery, which, look from what room of it he would, charmed his eye. But for one thing, he had been content to do as she wished, and go to live there. That one thing—what was it? Hear the low-breathed, reluctant words he is beginning to say to Lady Godolphin:

"There is an old tradition in our family,—a superstition, I suppose you will call it,—that if the Godolphins quit Ashlydyat, their ruin is near."

Lady Godolphin stared at him in amazement. Nothing had surprised her on her arrival at Ashlydyat, like the stories of marvel which she had

been obliged to hear. Sir George had cast ridicule to them, if alluded to ~~at~~ his presence; therefore, when the above words dropped from him, she could only wonder. You might search a town through, and not find one less prone to superstition than was Lady Godolphin: in all that pertained to it, she was a very heathen. Sir George hastened to explain away his words.

"The tradition is nothing, and I regard it as nothing. That such a one has been handed down, is certain, and it may have given rise to the reluctance, which the early Godolphins entertained, to quit Ashlydyat. But that is not our reason: in remaining in it we only obey a father's behest. You are aware that Ashlydyat is not entailed. It is bequeathed by will from father to son; and, to the bequest in each will, so far as I have back cognizance of the wills, there has always been appended a clause—a request—I should best say an enjoiner—never to quit Ashlydyat. 'When once you shall have come into Ashlydyat's possession, guard it as your stronghold: resign it neither to your heir nor to a stranger: remain in it until death shall take you.' It was inserted in my father's will, by which Ashlydyat became mine: it is inserted in mine, which devises the estate to Thomas."

"If ever I heard so absurd a story!" uttered Lady Godolphin, in her pretty, childish manner. "Do I understand you to say that, if you left Ashlydyat to take up your abode elsewhere, it would be no longer yours?"

"Not that, not that," returned Sir George. "Ashlydyat is mine until my death, and no power can take it from me. But, a reluctance to quit Ashlydyat has always clung to the Godolphins: in fact, we have looked up to it as a step impossible to be taken."

"What a state of thralldom to live in!"

"Pardon me. We love Ashlydyat. To remain in it, is pleasant; to quit

it, would be pain. I speak of the Godolphins in general; of those who have preceded me."

"I understand now," said Lady Godolphin, resentfully. "You hold a superstition that if you were to quit Ashlydyat for the Folly, some dreadful doom of ruin would overtake you. Sir George, I thought we lived in the nineteenth century."

A passing flush rose to the face of Sir George Godolphin. To be suspected of leaning to these superstitions chafed his mind unbearably; he had almost rather be accused of dishonor; not to his own heart would he admit that they might have weight with him. "Ashlydyat is our homestead," he said. "And when a man has a homestead, he likes to live and die in it."

"You cannot think Ashlydyat so desirable a residence as the Folly. We *must* remove to the Folly, Sir George; I have set my heart upon it. Let Thomas and his sisters come back to Ashlydyat."

"They would not come."

"Not come! They were inwardly rebellious enough at having to quit it."

"I am sure that Thomas would not take up his residence here, as Ashlydyat's master, during my lifetime. Another thing: we should not be justified in keeping up two expensive establishments outside the town, leaving the house at the bank to lie idle. People might lose confidence, if they saw us launch forth into extravagance."

"Oh, indeed! What did they think of the expense launched upon the Folly?" mockingly smiled my lady.

"They know it is your money which has built that: not mine."

"If Thomas and the rest came to Ashlydyat, you might let the house attached to the bank."

"It would take a great deal more money to keep up Ashlydyat than it does the house at the bank. The public might lose confidence in us,

I say. Besides, no one but a partner could be allowed to live at the bank."

"You seem to find a combating answer to all my propositions," said Lady Godolphin, in her softest and sweetest, and least true tone; "but I warn you, Sir George, that I shall win you over to my way of thinking before the paper shall be dry on the Folly's walls. If Thomas cannot, or will not, live at Ashlydyat, you must let it."

In every tittle did Lady Godolphin carry out her words. Almost before the Folly's embellishments were matured to receive them, Sir George was won over to live at it: and Ashlydyat advertised to be let. Thomas Godolphin would not have become its master, in his father's lifetime, had Sir George filled its rooms with gold to bribe him. His mother had contrived to imbue him with some of the Ashlydyat superstition,—to which *she* had lived a slave,—and Thomas though, he did not bow down to it, would not brave it. If ruin was to come—some religiously believed—when a reigning Godolphin voluntarily abandoned Ashlydyat, Thomas, at least, would not help it on by taking part in the step. So Ashlydyat, to the intense astonishment of Prior's Ash, was put up in the market for hire.

It was taken by a Mr. Verrall: a gentleman from London. Prior's Ash knew nothing of him, except that he was fond of field-sports, and appeared to be a moneyed man: but, the fact of his establishing himself at Ashlydyat, stamped him, in their estimation, as one worthy to be courted. His wife was a pretty, fascinating woman; her sister, Miss Pain, was beautiful: their entertainments were good, their style was dashing, and they grew into high fashion in the neighborhood.

But, from the very first day that the step was mooted of Sir George Godolphin's taking up his residence at the Folly, until that of his removal thither, the shadow had hovered over the dark Plain at Ashlydyat.

CHAPTER III.

THE DARK PLAIN IN THE MOONLIGHT.

THE beams of the setting sun streamed into the dining-room at Lady Godolphin's Folly. A room of fine proportions; not dull and heavy, as it is much the custom for dining-rooms to be, but light and graceful as could be wished.

Sir George Godolphin, with his fine old beauty, sat at one end of the table; Lady Godolphin, good-looking also in her peculiar style, was opposite to him. She wore a white dress, its make remarkably young, and her hair fell in ringlets, young also. On her right hand sat Thomas Godolphin, courteous and calm as he ever was; on her left hand was Bessy, whom you have already seen. On the right of Sir George sat Maria Hastings, singularly attractive in her quiet loveliness, in her white-spotted muslin dress with its white ribbons. On his left, sat his eldest daughter, Janet. Quiet in manner, plain in features, as was Thomas, her eyes were yet wonderful to behold. Not altogether for their beauty, but for the power they appeared to contain of seeing all things. Large, reflective, strangely-deep eyes, grey, with a circlet of darker grey round them. When they were cast upon you, it was not at you they looked, but at what was within you—at your mind, your thoughts; at least, such was the impression they conveyed. She and Bessy were dressed alike, in grey, watered silk. Cecil sat between Janet and Thomas, a charming girl, with blue ribbons in her hair. George sat between his sister Bessy and Maria Hastings. Thomas was attired much as he had been in the morning: George had exchanged his hunting-clothes for dinner dress.

Lady Godolphin was speaking of her visit to Scotland. Sir George's illness had caused it to be put off, or they would have gone in August: it was proposed to proceed thither now. "I have written finally to say that we

shall be there on Tuesday," she observed.

"Will papa be able to make the journey in one day?" asked Bessy.

"He says he is quite strong enough now to do so," replied Lady Godolphin. "But I could not think of his running any risk, so we shall stay a night upon the road. Janet, will you believe that I had a battle with Mr. Hastings to-day?"

Janet turned her strange eyes on Lady Godolphin. "Had you, madam?"

"I consider Mr. Hastings the most unreasonable, changeable man I ever met with," complained Lady Godolphin. "But, clergymen are apt to be so. So obstinate, if they take up a thing! When Maria was invited to accompany us in August, Mr. Hastings made not a single demur; neither he nor Mrs. Hastings: they got her,—oh, all sorts of new things for the visit. New dresses and bonnets; and,—a new cloak, was it not, Maria?"

Maria smiled. "Yes, Lady Godolphin."

"People who have never been in Scotland acquire the notion that in temperature it may be matched with the North Pole, so a warm cloak was provided for Maria for an August visit! I called at the rectory to-day with Maria, after the hounds had thrown off, to tell them that we should depart next week, and Mr. Hastings wanted to withdraw his consent to her going. 'Too late in the season now,' he urged; or some such plea. I told him she should not get frozen; that we would be back before the cold set in."

Maria lifted her sweet face, an earnest look upon it. "It was not the cold papa thought of, Lady Godolphin: he knows I am more hardy than to fear that. But, as the winter approaches, there is so much more to do, both at home and abroad. Mamma has to be out a great deal: and this will be a heavy winter with the poor, after all the sickness."

"The sickness has passed," ex-

claimed Lady Godolphin, in a tone so sharp, so eager, as to give rise to a suspicion that she might fear, or had feared, the sickness for herself.

"Nearly so," assented Miss Godolphin. "There have been no fresh cases since——"

"Janet, if you talk of 'fresh cases' at my table, I shall retire from it," interrupted Lady Godolphin, in agitation. "Is fever a pleasant or fitting topic of conversation, pray?"

Janet Godolphin bowed her head. "I did not forget your fears, madam. I supposed, however, that, now that the sickness is subsiding, your objection to hearing it spoken of might have subsided also."

"And how did the controversy with Mr. Hastings end?" interposed Bessy, to turn the topic. "Is Maria to go?"

"Of course she is to go," said Lady Godolphin, with a quiet little laugh of power, as she recovered her good humor. "When I wish a thing, I generally carry my point. I would not stir from his room until he gave his consent, and he had his sermon on the table, and was no doubt wishing me at the antipodes. He thought Maria had already paid me a visit long enough for Sir George to have tired of her, he said. I told him that was not his business: and that whether Sir George or anybody else was tired of her, I should take her to Scotland. So he yielded."

Maria Hastings glanced timidly at Sir George. He saw the look. "Not tired of you yet, are we, Miss Hastings?" he said, with, Maria fancied, more gallantry than warmth. But fancy, with Maria, sometimes went a great way.

"It would have been a disappointment to Maria," pursued Lady Godolphin. "Would it not, my dear?"

"Yes," she answered, her face flushing.

"And so very dull for Charlotte Pain. I expressly told her, when I invited her, that Maria Hastings would be of the party."

"Charlotte Pain!" uttered Bessy Godolphin, in her quick fashion, "is

she going with you? What in the world is that for?"

"I invited her, I say," said Lady Godolphin, with a hard look on her bloom-tinted face; a look that it always wore when her wishes were questioned, her actions reflected on. None brooked interference less than Lady Godolphin.

Sir George bent his head slightly towards his wife. "My dear, I consider that Charlotte Pain invited herself. She fished pretty strongly for the invitation, and you fell into the snare."

"Snare! It is an honor and a pleasure that she should come with us. What do you mean, Sir George?"

"An honor, if you like to call it such; I am sure it will be a pleasure," replied Sir George. "A most attractive young woman is Charlotte Pain: though she did angle for the invitation. George, take care how you play your cards."

"What cards, sir?"

"Look at that graceless George; at his eye of conscious vanity!" exclaimed Sir George to the table generally. "He knows who it is that makes the attraction here to Charlotte Pain. Wear her if you can win her, my boy."

"Would Charlotte Pain be one worthy to be won by George Godolphin?" quietly spoke Janet.

"Rumor says she has thirty thousand charms," nodded Sir George.

"I never would marry for money, if I were George," cried Cecil, indignantly. "And, papa, I do not see so much beauty in Charlotte Pain. I do not like her style."

"Cecil, did you ever know one pretty girl like the 'style' of another?" asked George.

"Nonsense! But, George, you are never going to fall in love with Charlotte Pain! Are you?"

"As if I should tell tales out of school!" laughed Mr. George.

"Did she ride well to-day, George?" inquired his father.

"She always rides well, sir," replied George.

"I wish I had invited her to dinner!" said Lady Godolphin.

"I wish you had," assented Sir George.

Nothing more was said upon the subject; the conversation fell into other channels. But, when the ladies had withdrawn, and Sir George was alone with his sons, he renewed it.

"Mind, George, I was not in jest, when speaking of Charlotte Pain. It is getting time that you married."

"Need a man think of marriage on this side of thirty, sir?"

"Some men need not think of it on this side forty or on this side fifty, unless they choose: your brother Thomas is one," returned Sir George. "But they are those who know how to sow their wild oats without it."

"I shall sow mine all in good time," said George, with a gay, half-conscious laugh.

"I wish you would fix the time and keep it, then," was the marked rejoinder. "It might be better for you."

"Fix the time for my marriage, do you mean, sir?"

"You know what I mean. But, I suppose you do intend to marry some time, George?"

"I dare say I shall. It is a thing that comes to most of us as a matter of course; like the measles or vaccination," spoke irreverent George. "You mentioned Charlotte Pain, sir: I presume you have no urgent wish that my choice should fall upon her?"

"If I had, would you comply with it?"

George raised his blue eyes to his father. "I have never thought of Charlotte Pain as a wife."

"She is a fine girl, a wonderfully fine girl; and if, as is rumored, she has a large fortune, you might go farther and fare worse," remarked Sir George. "If you don't like Charlotte Pain, find out somebody else that you would like. Only, take care that there's money."

"Money is desirable in itself. But it does not invariably bring happiness, sir."

"I never heard that it brought un-

happiness, Master George. I cannot have you both marry portionless women. Thomas has chosen one who has nothing: it will not do for you to follow his example. The world is before you: choose wisely."

"If we choose portionless women, we are not portionless ourselves."

"We have a credit to keep up before the public, George. It stands high; it deserves to stand high; I hope it always will. But I do consider it necessary that one of you should marry a fortune; I should have been glad that both had done it. Take the hint, George: and never expect my consent to your making an undesirable match, for it would not be given."

"But, if my inclination fixed itself upon one who has no money, what then, sir?" asked bold George, carelessly.

"Sir George pushed from before him a dish of filberts, so hastily as to scatter them on the table. It proved to his sons, who knew him well, that the question had annoyed him.

"Your inclinations are as yet free, George: I say the world is before you, and you may choose wisely. If you do not; if, after this warning, you suffer your choice to rest where it is undesirable that it should rest, you will do it in deliberate defiance. In that case I should disinherit you: partially, if not wholly."

Something appeared to be on the tip of George's tongue, but he checked it, and there ensued a pause.

"Thomas is to be allowed to follow his choice," he presently said.

"I had not warned Thomas with regard to a choice; therefore he has been guilty of no disobedience. It is his having chosen as he has, that reminds me to caution you. Be careful, my boy."

"Well, sir, I have no intention of marrying yet, and I suppose you will not disinherit me for keeping single," concluded George, good-humoredly. He rose to leave the room as he spoke, throwing a merry glance towards Thomas as he did so, who had taken

no part whatever in the conversation.

The twilight of the evening had passed, but the moon shone bright and clear, rendering the night nearly as light as day. Janet Godolphin stood on the lawn with Miss Hastings, when George stepped out and joined them.

"Moon-gazing, Janet?"

"Yes," she answered. "I am going on to the ash-trees."

George paused before he again spoke. "Why are you going thither?"

"Because," whispered Janet, glancing uneasily around, "they say the shadow is there again."

George himself had heard that it was: had heard it, as you know, from Charlotte Pain. But he chose to make mockery of his sister's words.

"Some say the moon's made of green cheese," quoth he. "Who told you that nonsense?"

"It has been told to me," mysteriously returned Janet. "Margery saw it last night, for one."

"Margery sees double, sometimes. Do not go, Janet."

Janet's only answer was to put the hood of her cloak over her head, and walk away. Bessy Godolphin ran up at this juncture.

"Is Janet going to the ash-trees? She'll turn into a ghost herself some time, believing all the rubbish Margery chooses to dream! I shall go and tell her so."

Bessy followed in the wake of her sister. George turned to Miss Hastings.

"Have you a cloak also, Maria? Draw it round you, then, and let us go after them."

He caught her to him with a fond gesture, and they hastened on. Down from the eminence where rose the Folly, to the lower ground nearer Ashlydyat. The Dark Plain lay to the right, and as they struck into a narrow, overhung walk, its gloom contrasted unpleasantly with the late brightness. Maria Hastings drew nearer to her companion with an involuntary shiver.

"Why did you come this dark way, George?"

"It is the most direct. In the dark or in the light you are safe with me. Did you notice Sir George's joke about Charlotte Pain?"

The question caused her heart to beat wildly. "Was it a joke," she breathed.

"Of course it was a joke. But he has been giving me a lecture upon—upon—"

"Upon what?" she inquired, helping out his hesitation.

"Upon the expediency of sowing my wild oats and settling down into a respectable man," laughed George. "I promised him it should be done some time. I cannot afford it just yet, Maria," he added, his tone changing to earnestness. "But I did not tell him that."

Meanwhile, Janet Godolphin had gained the ash-trees. She quietly glided before them underneath their shade to reach the bench. It was placed quite back, quite amidst them, in what might almost be called an alcove formed by the trees. Janet paused ere turning in, her sight thrown over the Dark Plain.

"Heavens and earth, how you startled me! Is it you, Miss Godolphin?"

The exclamation came from Charlotte Pain, who was seated there. Miss Godolphin was startled also: and her tone, as she spoke, betrayed considerable vexation.

"You here, Miss Pain! A solitary spot, is it not, for a young lady to be sitting in alone at night?"

"I was watching for that strange appearance which you, in this neighborhood, call the shadow," she explained. "I saw it last evening."

"Did you?" freezingly replied Janet Godolphin, who had an unconquerable aversion to the superstitious sign being seen or spoken of by strangers.

"Well, pray, and where's the shadow?" interrupted Bessy Godolphin, coming up. "I see nothing, and my eyes are as good as yours, Janet: better, I hope, than Margery's."

"I do not see it to-night," said

Charlotte Pain. "Here are more footsteps! Who else is coming?"

"Did you ever know the shadow come when it was watched for?" cried Janet to Bessy, in a half-sad, half-resentful tone, as her brother and Maria Hastings approached. "Watch for it and it does not come. It never yet struck upon the sight of any one but it struck unexpectedly."

"As it did upon me last night," said Charlotte Pain. "It was a strange-looking shadow: but, as to its being supernatural, the very supposition of it is ridiculous. I beg your pardon if I offend your prejudices, Miss Godolphin."

"Child! why did you come?" cried Janet Godolphin to Maria.

"I had no idea you did not wish me to come."

"Wish! It is not that. But you are little more than a child, and might be spared these sights."

There appeared to be no particular sight to spare anybody. They stood in a group, gazing eagerly. The Dark Plain was stretched out before them, the bare patch of clear ground, the archway behind; all bright in the moonlight. No shadow or shade was to be seen. Charlotte Pain moved to the side of George Godolphin.

"You told me I was fanciful this morning, when I said the Dark Plain put me in mind of a graveyard," she said to him in a half-whisper. "See it now! Those low scattered bushes look precisely like grave-mounds."

"But we know them to be bushes," returned George.

"That is not the argument. I say they *look* like it. If you brought a stranger here first by moonlight, and asked him what the Plain was, he would say a graveyard."

"Thus it has ever been!" murmured Janet Godolphin to herself. "At the first coming of the shadow it will be here capriciously; visible one night, invisible the next: betokening that the evil is not here yet, that it is only hovering! You are sure you saw it, Miss Pain?"

"I am quite sure that I saw a

shadow, bearing a strange and distinct form, there, in front of the archway. But I am equally sure it is to be accounted for by natural causes. But that my eyes tell me there is no building, or sign of building, above the Dark Plain, I should say it was cast from thence. Some fairies, possibly, may be holding up a sheet there," she carelessly added, "playing at magic lantern in the moonlight."

"Standing in the air," sarcastically returned Miss Godolphin. "Archimedes offered to move the world with his lever, if the world would only find him a place, apart from itself, to stand on."

"Are you convinced, Janet?" laughed George.

"Of what?"

He pointed over the Plain. "That there is nothing uncanny to be seen to-night. I'll send Margery here when I go back."

"I am convinced of one thing—that it is getting uncommonly damp," said practical Bessy. "I never stood under these ash-trees in an evening yet, let the atmosphere be ever so cold and clear, but a dampness might be felt. I wonder if it is in the nature of ash-trees to exhale damp? Maria, the rector would not thank us for bringing you here."

"Is Miss Hastings so susceptible to cold?" asked Charlotte Pain.

"Not more so than other people are," was Maria's answer.

"It is her child-like, delicate appearance, I suppose, that makes us fancy it," laughed Bessy Godolphin. "Come, let us depart. If Lady Godolphin could see us here, she would go crazy: she says, you know, that damp brings the fever."

They made a simultaneous movement. Their road lay to the right; Charlotte Pain's to the left. "I envy you four," she said, after wishing them good-night. "You are a formidable body, numerous to do battle with any assailants you may meet in your way, fairies, or shadows, or fever, or what not. I must encounter them alone."

"Scarcely," replied George Godolphin, as he drew her arm within his, and turned with her in the direction of Ashlydyat.

Arrived at Lady Godolphin's Folly, the Miss Godolphins passed in-doors; Maria Hastings lingered a moment behind them. She leaned against a white pillar of the terrace, looking forth on the lovely night. Not altogether was that peaceful scene in accordance with her heart, for, in that, warred passionate jealousy. Who was Charlotte Pain, she asked herself, that she should come between them with her beauty; with her—

Some one was hastening towards her; crossing the green lawn, springing up the steps of the terrace: and the jealous feeling died away into love.

"Were you waiting for me?" whispered George Godolphin. "We met Verrall, so I resigned Mademoiselle to his charge. Maria, how your heart is beating!"

"I was startled when you ran up so quickly; I did not think it could be you," was the evasive answer. "Let me go, please."

"My darling, don't be angry with me: I could not well help myself. You know with whom I would rather have been."

He spoke in the softest whisper; he gazed tenderly into her face, so fair and gentle in the moonlight; he clasped her to him with an impassioned gesture. And Maria, as she yielded to his tenderness in her pure love, and felt his stolen kisses on her lips, forgot the jealous trouble, that was being wrought by Charlotte Pain.

CHAPTER IV.

ALL-SOULS' RECTORY.

At the Eastern end of Prior's Ash was situated the church and rectory of All Souls',—a valuable living, the Reverend Isaac Hastings its incum-

bent. The house, enclosed from the high-road by a lofty hedge, was built, like the church, of grey stone. It was a commodious residence, but its rooms, save one, were small. This one had been added to the house of late years: a long, though somewhat narrow room, its three windows looking on the flowered lawn. A very pleasant room to sit in on a summer's day, when the grass was green, and the many-colored flowers, with their gay brightness and their perfume, gladdened the senses, and the birds were singing and the bees and butterflies sporting.

Less pleasant to-day,—for, the skies wore a grey hue; the wind sighed round the house with an ominous sound, telling of the coming winter; and the mossy lawn and the paths were dreary with the yellow leaves, decaying as they lay. Mrs. Hastings, a lady-like woman of middle height and fair complexion, stood at one of these windows, watching the bending of the trees as the wind shook them; watching the leaves falling. She was remarkably susceptible to surrounding influences; seasons and weather holding much power over her: but that she was a clergyman's wife, and, as such, obliged to take a very practical part in the duties of life, she might have subsided into a valetudinarian.

A stronger gust sent the leaves rustling up the path, and Mrs. Hastings slightly shivered:

"How I dislike this time of year!" she exclaimed. "I wish there was no autumn."

"I like the autumn: although it heralds in the winter."

The reply came from Mr. Hastings, who was pacing the carpet, thinking over the next day's sermon: for it was Saturday morning. Nature had not intended Mr. Hastings for a parson, and his sermons were the bane of his life. An excellent man; a most efficient pastor of a parish; a gentleman, a scholar, abounding in good practical sense; but *not* a preacher. Sometimes he wrote his sermons,

sometimes he tried the without-book plan; but, let him do as he would, there was always a conviction of failure, as to his sermons winning their way to his hearers' hearts. He was under the middle height, with keen aquiline features, his dark hair already sprinkled with grey.

"I like the winter," said Mrs. Hastings, in reply. "I like a snowy day; I like a frosty one, when the hoar-frost hangs in icicles from the trees and the hedges; I do not grumble at a good soaking rain. But when the leaves change color, and fall, leaving the trees bare, and the autumn wind moans its sad song, it is that which I dislike. It speaks too forcibly of the decay that awaits us all.

'Leaves have their time to fall,
And flowers to wither at the north
wind's breath,
And stars to set: but all,
Thou hast all seasons for thine own,
O Death!'

"I never see the leaves fall, but those lines come into my memory; and then they haunt me for days," concluded Mrs. Hastings.

The lines sounded to the rector something like what he would have called rank rubbish, for he was a plain-speaking man. "Who are they by?" asked he. "They are not Shakspeare's."

Mrs. Hastings laughed. "Not by anybody with a name so illustrious. I met with them many years ago, and they impressed themselves upon my memory. As I tell you, they come into it without effort of mine, whenever I see the leaves as we see them now."

"I am glad the wind has changed," remarked the rector. "We shall say good-by to the fever. While that warm weather lasted, I always had my fears of its breaking out afresh. It was but coquetting with us. I wonder——"

Mr. Hastings stopped, as if lapsing into thought. Mrs. Hastings inquired what his "wonder" might be.

"I was thinking of Sir George

Godolphin," he continued. "One thought leads to another and another, until we have a strange train: if we wanted to trace them back. Beginning with dead leaves, and ending with—metaphysics."

"What are you talking of, Isaac?" his wife asked, in surprise.

A half smile crossed the thin, delicate lips of Mr. Hastings. "You spoke of the dead leaves: that, led to the thought of the fever; the fever to the bad drainage; the bad drainage to the declaration of Sir George Godolphin that, if he lived till next year, it should be remedied, even though he had to pay the expense himself. Then the train went on to speculate upon whether Sir George would live; and next upon whether this change of weather may not cause my lady to relinquish her journey; and lastly, to Maria. Cold Scotland, if we are to have a season of bleak winds, cannot be beneficial to Sir George."

"Lady Godolphin has set her mind upon going. She is not likely to relinquish it."

"Mark you, Caroline," said Mr. Hastings, halting in his promenade, and standing opposite his wife, "it is her dread of the fever which is sending her to Scotland. But for that, she would not go, now that it is so late in the year."

"She has dreaded the fever very much, I know."

"Dreaded it to folly, we might be tempted to say, only that there are certain natures which cannot help this dread, and I suppose Lady Godolphin's is one. She did not like to run away from Sir George in his dangerous illness, and so lay herself open to the comments of Prior's Ash; but I am sure she wished to run. With this change in the weather, from warmth to cold, and the fever subsiding, I should not now be surprised if she alters her plans, and remains at home. I hope she will."

"Why?" asked Mrs. Hastings.

"On Maria's account. I do not wish Maria to go to Scotland."

"You said so yesterday, Isaac;

and answered me evasively when I inquired your reason. What may your objection be?"

Mr. Hastings knitted his brow. "It is an objection more easy to feel than to tell."

"When the invitation was given in the summer, you were pleased that she should go."

"Yes; I acknowledge it: and, had they gone then, I should have felt no repugnance to the visit. But I now do feel a repugnance to it, so far as Maria is concerned,—an unaccountable repugnance. If you ask me to explain it, or to tell you what my reason is, I can only answer that I am unable. It is this want of reason, good or bad, which has prevented me entirely withdrawing the consent I gave. I essayed to do so, when Lady Godolphin was here on Thursday; but she pressed me closely, and, having no sound or plausible argument to bring forward against it, my opposition broke down."

"I cannot see why you should object to her going!" exclaimed Mrs. Hastings. "It is a desirable visit for Maria in all ways."

"I feel that: and yet, that an aversion to it has taken possession of me, is a fact not to be controverted. There is a feeling at work within me, which would prompt me yet to keep her at home."

"I should have the laugh at you then, Isaac. You sometimes call us women to account for acting, as you phrase it, without reason. I hope you will not needlessly interfere with this little pleasure offered to Maria."

Did the concluding words, spoken with the slightest touch of severity, of mockery, decide the rector to put aside his idea of objection and recur to it no more? From that time he did not again mention it. Never was there a man less given to whims and fancies than the Reverend Isaac Hastings. His actions and thoughts were based on the sound principle of plain matter-of-fact sense: he was all practical; there was not a grain of ideality in his composition.

At that moment a visitor's knock was heard. Mrs. Hastings wondered who it could be. The habits of the rectory were known and respected in Prior's Ash, and it was not customary to pay indiscriminate visits to it upon a Saturday. Mrs. Hastings took an active part in her household, especially so with her children, and the concluding day of the week was a busy one. She now did what many another lady does, if she would only confess to it; opened the door the space of an inch to reconnoitre, as a servant crossed the hall to answer the knock.

"I declare it is Maria!" Mrs. Hastings exclaimed, throwing the door wider. "My dear, how early you have come down! I did not expect you till the afternoon."

Maria Hastings came in. She wore her grey Cashmere cloak, so soft and fine of texture, so delicate of hue; a pretty morning dress, and a straw bonnet trimmed with white. A healthy color shone on her delicate face, and her eyes were sparkling with inward happiness. Very attractive, very lady-like, was Maria Hastings.

"I was obliged to come this morning, mamma," she said, when greetings had passed. "Some of my things are here yet which I wish to take, and I must collect them and send them to the Folly. We start on Monday morning early: every thing must be packed to-day."

"One would suppose you were off for a year, Maria," exclaimed Mr. Hastings, "to hear you talk of 'collecting your things.' How many trunk-loads have you already at the Folly?"

"Only two, papa," she replied, laughing, and wondering why Mr. Hastings should speak with asperity. "They are trifles, chiefly, that I have come for; books, and such-like: not for clothes."

"Your papa thought it likely that Lady Godolphin would not now go, as the fine weather seems to be leaving us," said Mrs. Hastings.

"Oh yes she will," replied Maria. "Her mind is fully made up. Did

you not know that the orders had already been sent into Berwickshire? And some of the servants went on this morning."

"Great ladies change their minds sometimes," remarked Mr. Hastings, in a cynical tone.

Maria shook her head. She had untied the strings of her bonnet, and was unfastening her mantle. "Sir George, who had got up to breakfast since Thursday, asked Lady Godolphin this morning whether it would not be late for Scotland, and she resented the remark. What do you think she said, mamma? That if there was nothing else to take her to Scotland, this absurd rumor, of the shadow's having come again, would drive her thither."

"What's that, Maria?" demanded the clergyman, in a sharp, displeased accent.

"A rumor has arisen, papa, that the shadow is appearing at Ashlydyat. It was seen on Wednesday night. On Thursday night some of us went to the ash-trees——"

"You went?" interrupted the rector.

"Yes, papa," she answered, her voice growing timid, for he spoke in a tone of great displeasure. "I, and Miss Godolphin, and Bessy. We were not alone: George Godolphin was with us."

"And what did you see?" eagerly interposed Mrs. Hastings, who possessed more of the organ of marvel in her composition than her husband.

"Mamma, we saw nothing. Only the Dark Plain lying quietly under the moonlight. There appeared to be nothing to see; nothing unusual."

"But that I hear you say this with my own ears, I should not have believed you capable of giving utterance to folly so intense," sternly exclaimed Mr. Hastings to his daughter. "Are you the child of Christian parents? have you received an enlightened education?"

Maria's eyelids fell under the reproof, and the soft color in her cheeks deepened.

"That a daughter of mine should confess to running after a 'shadow!'" he continued, really with more asperity than the case seemed to warrant: but the rector of 'All Souls' was one who would have deemed it little less heresy to doubt his Bible, than to countenance a tale of superstition. He repudiated such with the greatest contempt: he never, even though proof positive had been brought before his eyes, could accord, to such, an iota of credence. "An absurd tale of a 'shadow,' fit only to be told to those who, in their blind credulity, formerly burnt poor creatures for witches; fit only to amuse the gaping ears of ignorant urchins, whom we put in our fields to frighten away the crows! And *my daughter* has lent herself to it! Can this be the result of your training, madam?" turning angrily to his wife—"or of mine?"

"I did not run after it from my own curiosity; I went because the rest went," deprecatingly answered poor Maria, in her confusion, all conscious that the stolen moonlight walk with Mr. George Godolphin had been a far more powerful moving motive to the expedition than the "shadow." "Miss Pain saw it on the Wednesday night; Margery saw it——"

"Will you cease?" broke forth the rector. "'Saw it!' If they said they saw it, they must have been laboring under a delusion; or else were telling a deliberate untruth. And you do not know better than to repeat the ignorance! What would Sir George think of you?"

"I shall not mention it in his presence, papa. Or in Lady Godolphin's."

"Neither shall you in mine. It is not possible"—Mr. Hastings stood before her and fixed his eyes sternly upon hers—"that you can be a believer in it?"

"I think not, papa," she answered, in her strict truth. To truth, at any rate, she had been trained, whether by father or by mother: and she would not violate it, even to evade displeasure. "I think that my feeling upon the point is curiosity; not belief."

'Then that curiosity implies belief," sternly replied the rector. "If a man came to me and said, 'There's an elephant out there in the garden,' and I went forth to see, would not that prove my credence in the assertion?"

Maria was no logician; or she had answered, "No, you might go to prove the error of the assertion." "Indeed, papa, if I know any thing of myself, I am not a believer in it," she repeated, her cheeks growing hotter and hotter. "If I were once to see the shadow, why then—"

"Be silent! be still!" he cried, not allowing her to continue. "I shall think next that I am talking to that silly dreamer, Janet Godolphin. Is it she who has imbued you with this tone of mind?"

Maria shook her head. There was an under-current of consciousness, lying deep in her heart, that if a "tone" upon the point had been insensibly acquired by her, it was caught from one far more precious to her heart, far more essential to her very existence, than was Janet Godolphin. That last Thursday night, in running with George Godolphin after this tale of the shadow, his arm cast lovingly round her, she had acquired the impression, from a few words he let fall, that he must be a believer in it. She was content that his creed should be hers in all things: had she wished to differ from him, it would have been beyond her power. Mr. Hastings appeared to wait for an answer.

"Janet Godolphin does not intrude her superstitious fancies upon the world, papa. Were she to seek to convert me to them, I should not listen."

"Dismiss the subject altogether from your thoughts, Maria," commanded the rector. "If men and women would perform efficiently their allotted part in life, there is enough of hard substance to occupy their minds and their hours, without losing either the one or the other in 'shadows.' Take you note of that."

"Yes, papa," she dutifully an-

swered, scarcely knowing whether she had deserved the lecture or not, but glad that it was at an end. "Mamma, where is Grace?"

"In the study. You can go to her. There's David!" exclaimed Mrs. Hastings, as Maria left the room.

A short, thick-set man had appeared in the garden, giving rise to the concluding remark of Mrs. Hastings. If you have not forgotten, my dear reader, you may remember that Bessy Godolphin spoke of a man who had expressed his pleasure at seeing her father out again. She called him "Old Jekyl." Old Jekyl lived in a cottage on the outskirts of Prior's Ash. He had been in his days a working-gardener, but rheumatism and growing age had put him beyond work now. There was a good piece of garden ground to his cottage, and it was made productive. Vegetables and fruit were grown in it; and a small board, tied in front of the laburnum-tree at the gate, intimated that "Cut flowers are sold here." There were also hives of bees. Old Jekyl (Prior's Ash never dignified him by any other title) had no wife: she was dead: but his two sons lived with him, and they followed the occupation that had been his. I could not tell you how many gardens in Prior's Ash and its environs those two men kept in order. Many a family, not going to the expense of keeping a regular gardener,—some, perhaps, not able to go to it,—entrusted the care of their garden to the Jekyls, paying them a stipulated sum yearly. The plan answered well. The gardens were kept in order, and the Jekyls earned a good living: both masters and men being contented.

They had been named Jonathan and David: and were as opposite as men and brothers could well be, both in nature and appearance. Each was worthy in his way. Jonathan stood six-feet-three, if he stood an inch, and was sufficiently slender for a genteel lamp-post: rumor went that he had occasionally been taken for one. An easy-going, obliging, talkative, mild-

tempered man, was Jonathan, making his opinions agree with everybody's. Mrs. Hastings was wont to declare that if she were to say to him, "You know, Jonathan, the sun never shone," his answer would be, "Well, ma'am, I don't know as ever it did, over-bright, like." David had the build of a Dutchman, and was taciturn upon most subjects. In manner he was somewhat surly, and would hold his own opinion, especially if it touched upon his occupation, against the world.

Amongst others who employed them in this way, was the rector of All Souls'. They were in the habit of coming and going, to that or any other garden, as they pleased, at whatever day or time suited their convenience: sometimes one brother, sometimes the other, sometimes one of the two boys they employed, as they might arrange between themselves. Any garden entrusted to their care they were sure to keep thoroughly in order; therefore their time and mode of doing it was not interfered with. Mrs. Hastings suddenly saw David in the garden.

"I will get him to sweep those ugly dead leaves from the paths," she exclaimed, throwing up the window. "David!"

David heard the call, turned round, and looked. Finding he was wanted, he advanced in a leisurely, independent sort of manner, giving his attention to the beds as he passed them, and stopping to pluck off any dead flower that offended his eye. He gave a nod as he reached Mrs. Hastings, the features of his face not relaxing in the least. The nod was a mark of respect, and meant as such,—the only demonstration of respect commonly shown by David. His face was not an ugly face, though too flat and broad; it was fair in complexion, and his eyes were blue.

"David, look how the leaves have fallen! how they lie upon the ground!"

David gave a half glance round, by way of answer, but he did not speak. He knew the leaves were there, without looking.

"You must clear them away," continued Mrs. Hastings.

"No," responded David to this. "Twon't be of no use."

"But, David, you know how very much I dislike to see these withered leaves," rejoined Mrs. Hastings, in a voice of pleading more than of command. Command answered little with David.

"Can't help seeing of 'em," persisted David. "Leaves will wither; and will fall; its the natur' of 'em to do it. If every one of them, lying there now, was raked up and swep' away, there'd be as many down again to-morrow morning. I can't neglect my beds to fad with them leaves,—and bring no good to pass after all."

"David, I do not think anybody ever was so self-willed as you!" said Mrs. Hastings, laughing in spite of her vexation.

"I know my business," was the answer of David. "If I gave in, at my different places, to all the missises' whims, how should I get my work done? the masters, they'd be for blowing of me up, thinking it were idleness. Look at Jonathan! he lets himself be swayed anyway; and a nice time he gets of it, among 'em. His day's work's never done."

"You will not suffer the leaves to lie there till the end of the season!" exclaimed Mrs. Hastings. "They would be above our ankles as we walked."

"Maybe they would," composedly returned David. "I have cleared 'em off about six times this fall, and I shall clear 'em again. But not as long as this wind lasts."

"Is it going to last, David?" inquired the rector, appearing at his wife's side, and laughing inwardly at her failure in diplomacy.

David nodded his usual salutation as he answered. He would sometimes relax so far as to say "Sir" to Mr. Hastings, an honor paid exclusively to his pastoral capacity. "No, it won't last, sir. We shall get the warm weather back again."

"You think so!" exclaimed the

rector, in an accent of disappointment. Experience had taught him that David, in regard to being weather-wise, was a very oracle.

"I am sure so," answered David. "The b'rometer's a going fast on to heat, too."

"Is it," said Mr. Hastings. "You have often told me you put no faith in the barometer."

"No more I don't: unless other signs answers to it," said David. "The very best b'rometer going, is old father's rheumatiz. There was a sharp frost last night, sir."

"I know it," replied Mr. Hastings. "A few nights of that, and the fever will be driven away."

"We shan't get a few nights of it," said David. "And the fever has broke out again."

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Hastings. "The fever broken out again?"

"Yes it have," said David.

The news fell upon the clergyman's heart like a knell. He had fully believed the danger to have passed away, though not yet the sickness. "Are you sure that it has broken out again, David?" he asked, after a pause.

"I ain't no surer than I was told, sir," returned phlegmatic David. "I met Cox just now, and he said, as he passed, that the fever had showed itself in a fresh place."

"Do you know where?" inquired Mr. Hastings.

"He said, I b'lieve; but I didn't catch it. If I stopped to listen to the talk of fevers, and such-like, where would my work be?"

David moved away ere he had done speaking; possibly from the impression that the present "talk" was not exactly forwarding his work.

"If this is true, Lady Godolphin will be sure to go," observed Mr. Hastings more in self-soliloquy than to his wife. It proved that the visit to Scotland was still uppermost in his thoughts. "I shall go out and see if I can glean any news," he added. "I do trust it may be a false alarm."

Taking his hat, one of very clerical

shape, with a broad brim the rector left his house. He was scarcely within the gates when he saw Mr. Snow, who was the most popular doctor in Prior's Ash, coming along quickly in his gig. Mr. Hastings held out his hand, and the groom pulled up.

"Is it true?—this fresh rumor of the fever?"

"Too true, I fear," replied Mr. Snow. "I am on my way thither now; just summoned."

"Who is attacked?"

"Sarah Anne Grame"

The name appeared to startle the rector. "Sarah Anne Grame!" he uttered. "She will never battle through it!" The doctor raised his eyebrows, as if he thought it doubtful, himself, and signed to his groom to hasten on.

"Tell Lady Sarah I will call upon her in the course of the day," called out Mr. Hastings, as the gig sped on its way. "I must ask Maria if she has heard news of this," he continued, in self-soliloquy, as he turned within the rectory gate.

Maria Hastings had found her way to the study. To dignify a room by the appellation "study" in a clergyman's house, would at once impart the idea that it must be the private sanctum of its master, consecrated to his sermons and his other clerical studies. Not so, however, in the rectory of All Souls'. The study there was chiefly consecrated to litter, and the master had less to do with it personally, than with almost any other room in the house. There, the children, boys and girls, played or learnt lessons, or practised; there, Mrs. Hastings would sit to sew when she had any work about, too plebeian for the polite eyes of visitors.

Grace, the eldest of the family, was twenty years of age, one year older than Maria. She bore a great resemblance to her father; and, like him, was more practical than imaginative. She was very useful in the house, and took much care off the hands of Mrs. Hastings. It happened that all the children, five of them besides Maria,

were this morning at home. It was holiday that day with the boys. Isaac was next to Maria, but nearly three years younger; one had died between them; Reginald was next; Harry last; and then came a little girl, Rose. They ought to have been preparing their lessons; were supposed to be so by Mr. and Mrs. Hastings: in point of fact, they were gathered round Grace, who was seated on a low stool solving some amusing puzzles from a new book. They started up when Maria entered, and went dancing round her.

Maria danced too; she kissed them all; she sang aloud in her glad joyousness of heart. What was it that made that heart so glad, bright as a very Eden? The ever constant presence in it of George Godolphin.

"Have you come home to stay, Maria?"

"I have come to go," she answered, with a gleeful laugh. "We start for Scotland on Monday, and I want to hunt up lots of things."

"It is fine to be you, Maria!" exclaimed Grace, with a sensation very like envy. "You get all the pleasure, and I have to stop at home and do all the work. It is not fair."

"Gracie dear, it will be your turn next. I did not *ask* Lady Godolphin to invite me, instead of you. I never thought of her inviting me, being the younger."

"But she did," grumbled Grace.

"I say, Maria, you are not to go to Scotland," struck in Isaac.

"Who says so?" cried Maria, her heart standing still, as she halted in one corner of the room with at least half a dozen arms round her.

"Mamma said yesterday she thought you were not: that papa would not have it."

"Is that all?" and Maria's pulses coursed on again. "I am to go: I have just been with papa and mamma. They know that I have come to get my things for the journey."

"Maria, who goes?"

"Sir George and my lady, and I and Charlotte Pain."

"Maria, I want to know why Charlotte Pain goes?" cried Grace.

Maria laughed. "You are like Bessy Godolphin, Grace. She asked the same question, and my lady answered, 'Because she chose to invite her.' I can only repeat to you the same reason."

"Does George Godolphin go?"

"No," replied Maria.

"Oh, doesn't he, though!" exclaimed Reginald. "Tell that to the marines, mademoiselle."

"He does not go with us," said Maria. "Or, if he does, I am not acquainted with the arrangement. Regy, you know you will get into hot water if you use those sea-phrases."

"Sea-phrases! that is just like a girl," retorted Reginald. "If I set on and let out a little quarter-deck language, there's nobody here to explode at it, unless you and Grace turn into enemies. What will you lay me that George Godolphin is not in Scotland within a week after you all get there?"

"I will not lay any thing," said Maria, who in her inmost heart hoped and believed that George *would* be there.

"Catch him stopping away if Charlotte Pain goes!" went on Reginald. "Yesterday I was at the pastry-cook's, having a tuck-out with that shilling old Crosse gave me, and Mr. George and Miss Charlotte came in. I heard a little."

"What did you hear?" breathed Maria. She could not help the question, any more than she could help the wild beating of her heart at the boy's words.

"I did not catch it all," said Reginald. "It was about Scotland, though, and what they should do when they were there. Mrs. Verrall's carriage came up then, and he put her into it. An out-and-out flirt is George Godolphin!"

Grace Hastings threw her keen, dark eyes upon Maria. "Do not let him flirt with *you*," she said, in a marked tone. "You like him; I do not. I never thought George Godolphin worth his salt."

"That's just like Grace!" exclaimed Isaac. "Taking her likes and dislikes! and for no cause or reason but her own crotchets or prejudices. He is the nicest fellow going, is George Godolphin. Charlotte Pain's is a new face and a beautiful one: let him admire it."

"He admires rather too many," nodded Grace.

"As long as he does not admire yours, you have no right to grumble," rejoined Isaac, provokingly: and Grace flung a bundle of work at him, for the laugh turned against her.

"Rose, you naughty child, you have got my crayons there!" exclaimed Maria, happening to cast her eyes upon the table, where Rose was seated too quietly to be at any thing but mischief.

"Only one or two of the sketching pencils, Maria," said Miss Rose. "I shan't hurt them. I am making a villa with two towers and some cows."

"I shall particularly want my sketching pencils," rejoined Maria, taking them up. "Lady Godolphin says there are some lovely views about the place. Rose, what have you been doing? The pencils are half cut away! You must have used a table-knife to hack them in this manner!"

"The boys would not lend me any of their penknives," was the little lady's excuse.

"Somebody find her a common pencil; there are plenty about," said Maria, taking possession of her own.

"Maria, it has got so late in the year that you ought to have taken your winter clothes," said Grace.

"Maria, what do you think? we had such a row in school yesterday!" roared Harry. "Old Peters threatened to expel a few."

"I say, Maria, is Charlotte Pain going to take that thorough-bred hunter of hers?" interposed Reginald.

"Of course," scoffed Isaac: "saddled and bridled. She'll have him with her in the railway carriage; put him in the corner seat opposite Sir George. Regy's brains may do for sea,—if he

can get there; but they are not sharp enough for land."

"They are as sharp as yours, at any rate," flashed Reginald. "Why should she not take him?"

"Be quiet, you boys," said Grace. "Maria, how frequently shall you write to us?"

In this desultory sort of way were they engaged, when disturbed by Mr. Hastings. He did not open the door at the most opportune moment. Maria, Isaac, and Harry were executing a dance that probably had no name in the dancing calender; Reginald was standing on his head; Rose had just upset the contents of the table, by inadvertently drawing off its old cloth cover, and Grace was scolding her in a high tone.

"What do you call this?" demanded Mr. Hastings, when he had leisurely surveyed the scene. "Studying?"

They subsided into quietness and their places; Reginald with his face red and his hair wild, Maria with a pretty blush, Isaac with a smothered laugh. Mr. Hastings addressed his second daughter.

"Have you heard any thing about this fresh outbreak of the fever?"

"No, papa," was the reply of Maria. "Has it broken out again?"

"I hear that it has attacked Sarah Anne Grame."

"Oh, papa!" uttered Grace, clasping her hands in sorrowful consternation. "Will she ever live through it?"

Just the same doubt, you see, that had occurred to the rector.

CHAPTER V.

THOMAS GODOLPHIN'S LOVE.

FOR nearly a mile beyond All Souls' Rectory, as you went out of Prior's Ash, there were scattered houses and cottages. In one of them lived Lady Sarah Grame. We take

our ideas from associations; and, in speaking of the residence of Lady Sarah Grame, or Lady Sarah Anybody, imagination might conjure up some fine old mansion, with its proper appurtenances,—grounds, and servants, and carriages, and grandeur: or, at least, a “villa with two turrets, and some cows,” as Rose Hastings expressed it.

Far more like an humble cottage than a fine mansion was the abode of Lady Sarah Grame. It was a small, pretty, detached white house, containing eight or nine rooms at the most; and they not very large ones. A plot of ground before it was crowded with flowers,—far too crowded, for good taste, as David Jekyl would point out to Lady Sarah; but Lady Sarah loved flowers, and would not part with one of them.

The daughter of one soldier, and the wife of another, Lady Sarah had scrambled through life amidst bustle, perplexity, and poverty. Sometimes quartered in barracks, sometimes following the army abroad; out of one place into another; never settled anywhere for long. It was an existence not to be envied: although it is the lot of many. She was Mrs. Grame then, and her husband, the captain, was not a very good husband to her: he was rather too fond of amusing himself, and he threw all the care upon her shoulders. She passed her days nursing her sickly children, and endeavoring to make one sovereign go as far as two. One morning, to her own unspeakable embarrassment, she found herself converted from plain Mrs. Grame into Lady Sarah. Her father boasted of a peer in a very remote relative, and came unexpectedly into the title.

Had he come into money with it, it would have been more welcome; but of that there was but a scanty supply. A poor, poor Scotch peerage, it was, with but narrow estates, and they encumbered. Lady Sarah wished she could drop the honor which had fallen to her share, unless she could live a little more in accord-

ance with it. She had much sorrow; she lost one child after another, until she had but two left, Sarah Anne and Ethel. Then she lost her husband; and, next, her father. Chance drove her to Prior's Ash, which was near her husband's native place; and she settled there, upon her limited means. All she possessed was her pension as a captain's widow, and the interest of a sum which her father had been enabled to leave her,—the whole not exceeding five hundred pounds a year. She took the white cottage, then just built, and dignified it with the name of “Grame House:” and the mansions in the vicinity of Prior's Ash were content not to laugh, but to pay respect to her as an earl's daughter.

Lady Sarah was a partial woman. She had but those two daughters, and her love for them was as contrasted as light is with darkness. Sarah Anne she regarded with an inordinate affection, almost amounting to a passion; for Ethel, she did not care. What could be the reason of this? What is the reason that parents (many such may be found) will love some of their children, and dislike others? They cannot tell, any more than Lady Sarah could. Ask them, and they will be unable to give you an answer. It does not lie in the children: it often happens that those, obtaining the least love, will be the most worthy of it. Such was the case here. Sarah Ann Grame was a pale, sickly, fretful girl; full of whims, full of complaints, giving trouble to everybody about her. Ethel, with her sweet countenance and her merry heart, made the sunshine of the home. She bore with her sister's exacting moods, she bore with her mother's want of love; *she* loved them both, and waited on them, and carolled forth her snatches of song as she moved about the house, and was as happy as the day was long. Ask the servants,—they kept only two,—and they would tell you that Miss Grame was cross and selfish; but that Miss Ethel was worth her weight in gold. The gold was soon to be appropri-

ated: transplanted to a home where it would be appreciated and cherished: for Ethel was the affianced wife of Thomas Godolphin.

On the morning already mentioned, when you have heard it said that the fever had broken out again, Sarah Anne Grame awoke, ill. In her impatient, fretful way, she called out to Ethel, who slept in an adjoining room. Ethel was fast asleep: but she was accustomed to be roused out of her bed at unseasonable hours by Sarah Anne, and she threw on her dressing-gown and hastened to her.

"I want some tea," began Sarah Anne. "I am as ill and thirsty as I can be."

Sarah Anne was really of a sickly constitution, and, to hear her complain of being "ill" and "thirsty," was nothing unusual. Ethel, in her loving nature, her sweet patience, received the information with as much concern as though she had never heard it before. She bent over Sarah Anne, and spoke tenderly.

"Where do you feel pain, dear? In your head?—or chest? What is it?"

"I tell you that I am ill and thirsty, and that's enough," peevishly answered Sarah Anne. "Go and get me some tea."

"As soon as I possibly can," said Ethel, soothingly. "There is no fire yet. The maids are not up. I do not think it can be later than six, by the look of the morning."

"Very well!" sobbed Sarah Anne—the sobs being contrived by the catching up of her breath in temper, not by tears. "You can't call the maids, I suppose! and you can't put yourself the least out of the way to alleviate my suffering! you want to go to bed again and sleep till eight o'clock! When I am dead, you'll wish you had been more like a sister. You possess great rude health yourself, and you can feel no compassion for anybody who does not."

An assertion unjust and untrue: like many another, made by Sarah Anne Grame. Ethel did not possess "rude health," though she was not,

like her sister, always ailing; and she felt far more compassion than Sarah Anne deserved.

"I will see what I can do," she gently said. "You shall soon have some tea."

Passing into her own room, Ethel hastily dressed herself: when Sarah Anne was in one of her exacting moods, there could be no more bed for Ethel. "I wonder," she thought to herself, "whether I could not get up the fire without calling the servants? They had so hard a day's work yesterday, for mamma kept them both at the cleaning from morning till night. Yes: if I can only find the sticks, I'll make the fire."

She went down to the kitchen, hunted up what was required, laid the fire and lighted it. It did not burn up well. She thought the sticks must be damp, and she got the bellows. There she was on her knees, blowing at the fagots, and sending the blaze up amidst the coal, when some one came into the kitchen.

"Miss Ethel!"

It was one of the servants, Elizabeth. She had heard moving in the house, and had risen. Ethel explained that her sister felt ill, and tea was wanted.

"Why did you not call us, Miss Ethel?"

"You went to rest late, Elizabeth. See how well I have made the fire!"

"It is not ladies' work, miss."

"I think ladies should put on gloves when they undertake it," merrily laughed Ethel. "Look at my black hands."

"What would Mr. Godolphin say if he saw you now, Miss Ethel? Kneeling down upon the bricks, lighting a fire!"

"Mr. Godolphin would say I was doing *right*, Elizabeth," returned Ethel, a shade of reproof in her firm tone, though the allusion caused the color to mantle in her cheeks. The girl had been with them some time, and assumed more license than a less respected servant would have been allowed to do.

The tea ready, Ethel carried a cup of it to her sister, with a slice of toast that they had made. Sarah Anne drank the tea at a draught, but she turned with a shiver from the toast. She seemed to be shivering much.

"Who was so stupid as to make that? You might know I should not eat it. I am too ill."

Ethel began to think that she looked unusually ill. Her face was flushed, shivering though she was, her lips were dry, her heavy eyes were unnaturally bright. She gently laid her hands, washed from the "black," upon her sister's brow. It felt burning, and Sarah Anne screamed out.

"Do keep your hands away! My head is splitting with pain."

Involuntarily Ethel thought of the fever, the danger, from which, they had been reckoning to have passed. It was a low sort of typhus which had prevailed; not very extensively, and chiefly amidst the poor: the chief fear had been, lest it should turn to a more malignant species. About half a dozen deaths had taken place, in the whole.

"Would you like me to bathe your forehead with water, Sarah Anne?" asked Ethel, kindly. "Or to get you some eau de Cologne?"

"I would like you to stop till things are asked for, and not to worry me," retorted Sarah Anne.

Ethel sighed. Not for the cross temper: Sarah Anne was always cross in illness: but for the suffering she thought she saw, and the half doubt, half dread, which had arisen within her. "I think I had better call mamma," she deliberated to herself. "Though, if she sees nothing unusual the matter with Sarah Anne, she will only be angry with me."

Proceeding to her mother's chamber, Ethel knocked softly. Lady Sarah slept still, but the entrance aroused her. "Mamma, I do not like to disturb you; I was unwilling to do it; but Sarah Anne is ill."

"Ill again! And only last week she was in bed three days! Poor dear sufferer! Is it her chest?"

"Mamma, she seems *unusually* ill. Otherwise I should not have disturbed you. I feared—I thought—you will be angry with me if I say, perhaps?"

"Say what? Don't stand like a statue, Ethel."

Ethel dropped her voice. "Dear mamma, suppose it should be the fever?"

For one startling moment, Lady Sarah felt as if a dagger was piercing her: the next, she turned upon Ethel. Fever for Sarah Anne! how dared she prophesy it? A low common fever, confined to the poor and the town, and which had gone away; or, all but! Was it likely to turn itself back again and come up here to attack her darling child! What did Ethel mean by it?

Ethel, the tears in her eyes, said she hoped it would prove to be only a common headache; that it was her love for Sarah Anne which awoke her fears. Lady Sarah proceeded to the sick-chamber; and Ethel followed. Her ladyship was not accustomed to observe caution, and she spoke freely of "the fever" before Sarah Anne; apparently for the purpose of casting blame at Ethel.

Sarah Anne did not catch the fear: she ridiculed Ethel as her mother did. For some hours Lady Sarah did not catch it, either. She would have summoned medical advice at first, but that Sarah Anne, in her peevishness, protested she would not have a doctor. Later she grew worse, and Mr. Snow was sent for. You saw him in his gig hastening to the house.

Lady Sarah came forward to receive him, Ethel, full of anxiety, near her. She was a thin woman, with a shrivelled face and a sharp red nose, her grey hair banded plainly under a close white net cap. Her style of head-dress never varied. It consisted always of a plain net cap with a quilled net border, trimmed with the ribbon that is called "love." Her black dresses she had not put off since the death of Captain Grame: and intended never to do so.

She grasped the arm of Mr. Snow. "You must save my child!"

"Higher aid permitting me," the surgeon answered. "Why do you assume it to be the fever? For the last six weeks I have been summoned by timid parents to a score of 'fever' cases; and when I have arrived, in hot haste, they have turned out to be no fever at all."

"This is the fever," replied Lady Sarah. "Had I been more willing to admit that it was, you would have been sent for hours ago. It was Ethel's fault. She suggested at daylight that it might be the fever; and it made my darling girl so angry that she forbid my sending for advice. But she is worse now. Come and see her."

Mr. Snow laid his hand upon Ethel's head with a fond gesture, as he followed Lady Sarah. All Prior's Ash loved Ethel Grame.

Tossing about her uneasy bed, her face crimson, her hair floating untidily round it, lay Sarah Anne, shivering still. The doctor gave one glance at her: it was quite enough to satisfy him that Lady Sarah was not mistaken.

"Is it the fever?" impatiently asked Sarah Anne, unclosing her hot eyelids.

"If it is, we must drive it away," said the doctor, cheerily.

"Why should the fever have come to me?" she rejoined, her tone one of rebellion.

"Why did I get thrown from my horse last year, and break my arm?" returned Mr. Snow. "These untoward things do come to us."

"To break an arm is nothing,—people always get well from that," irritably answered Sarah Anne.

"And we will get you well from the fever, if you will be quiet and reasonable."

"I am so hot! My head is so heavy!"

Mr. Snow, who had called for water and a glass, was mixing up a white powder which he had produced from his pocket. She drank it without opposition, and then he lessened the weight of the bed-clothes, and

afterward turned his attention to the chamber. It was close and hot; and the sun, which had just burst forth brightly from the grey skies, shone full upon it.

"You have got that chimney stuffed up!" he exclaimed.

"Sarah Anne will not allow it to be open," said Lady Sarah. "She is sensitive to cold, dear child, and feels the slightest draught."

Mr. Snow walked to the chimney, turned up his coat cuff and wristband, and pulled down a bag filled with shavings. Some soot came with it, and covered his hand; but he did not mind that. He was as little given to ceremony as Lady Sarah to caution, and he went leisurely up to the wash-hand-stand to wash it off.

"Now, if I catch that bag, or any other bag up there again, obstructing the air, I shall pull down the bricks next time, and make a good big hole that the sky can be seen through. Of that I give you notice, my lady."

He next pulled the window down at the top, behind the blind; but the chamber, at its best, did not find favor with him. "It is not airy; it is not cool," he said. "Is there not a better-ventilated room in the house? If so, she shall be moved to it."

"My room is a cool one," interposed Ethel, eagerly. "The sun never shines upon it, Mr. Snow."

It would appear that Ethel's thus speaking must have reminded Mr. Snow that she was present. In the unceremonious fashion that he had laid his hands upon the chimney-bag, he now laid them upon her shoulders, and marshalled her outside the door.

"You go down-stairs, Miss Ethel. And do not come within a mile of this chamber again, until I give you leave."

But meanwhile, Sarah Anne was talking also, imperiously and fretfully. "I will not be moved into Ethel's room! It is not furnished with half the comforts of mine. It has only a bit of bedside carpet! I will not go there, Mr. Snow."

"Now look you here, Miss Sarah

Anne!" said the surgeon, firmly, "I am responsible for getting you well out of this illness; and I shall take my own way to do it. If not, if I am to be contradicted at every suggestion, Lady Sarah can summon somebody else to attend you: I will not undertake it."

"My darling, you shall not be moved to Ethel's room," cried my lady, coaxingly: "you shall be moved to mine. It is larger than this, you know, Mr. Snow, with a thorough draught through it, if you choose to put the windows and door open."

"Very well," said Mr. Snow. "Let me find her in it when I come up again this evening. And if there's a carpet on the floor, take it up. Carpets never were intended for bedrooms."

He went into one of the sitting-rooms with Lady Sarah when he descended. "What do you think of the case?" she eagerly asked.

"There will be some difficulty with it," was his candid reply. "Lady Sarah, her hair must come off."

"Her hair come off!" uttered Lady Sarah, aghast. "That it never shall! She has the most lovely hair! What is Ethel's hair, compared to hers?"

"You heard the determination I expressed, Lady Sarah," he quietly said.

"But Sarah Anne will never allow it to be done," she returned, shifting the ground of remonstrance from her own shoulders. "And, to do it in opposition, would be enough to kill her."

"It will not be done in opposition," he answered. "She will be unconscious before it is attempted."

Lady Sarah's heart sank. "You anticipate that she will be dangerously ill!"

"In these cases there is always danger, Lady Sarah. But worse cases than—as I believe—hers will be, have got well over it."

"If I lose her, I shall die myself!" she passionately uttered. "And, if she is to have it badly, she will die!

Remember, Mr. Snow, how weak she has always been!"

"We sometimes find that the weak of constitution battle best with an epidemic," he replied. "Many a hearty one has it struck down and taken off; many a sickly one has struggled through it, and been the better afterward."

"Every thing shall be done as you wish," said Lady Sarah, speaking meekly, in her great fear.

"Very well. There is one caution I would earnestly impress upon you: that of keeping Ethel from the sick-room."

"But there is nobody to whom Sarah Anne is so accustomed, as a nurse," objected Lady Sarah.

"Madam!" burst forth the doctor in his heat, "would you subject Ethel to the risk of taking the infection, in deference to Sarah Anne's selfishness, or to yours? Better lose all the treasures your house contains, than lose Ethel! She is its greatest treasure."

"I know how remarkably prejudiced you have always been in Ethel's favor," resentfully spoke Lady Sarah.

"If I disliked her as much as I like her, I should be equally solicitous to guard her from the danger of infection," said Mr. Snow. "If you chose to put Ethel out of consideration, you cannot put Thomas Godolphin. In justice to him, she must be taken care of."

Lady Sarah opened her mouth to reply, but closed it again. Strange words had been hovering upon her lips. "If Thomas Godolphin were not blind, his choice would have fallen upon Sarah Anne, not upon Ethel." In her heart, that was a sore topic of resentment; for she was fully alive to the advantages of a union with a Godolphin. Those words were swallowed down, to give utterance to others.

"Ethel is in the house, and therefore must be liable to take the infection, whether she visits the chamber or not. I cannot fence her round with

an air-tight wall, so that not a breath of tainted atmosphere shall touch her. I would if I could; but I cannot."

"I would send her from the house, Lady Sarah. At any rate, I forbid her to go near her sister. I don't want two patients on my hands, instead of one," he added, in his quaint fashion, as he took his departure.

He was about to get into his gig, when he saw Mr. Godolphin advancing with a quick step. "Which of them is it who is seized?" inquired the latter, as he came up.

"Not Ethel, thank goodness!" responded the surgeon. "It is Sarah Anne. I have been recommending my lady to send Ethel from home. I should send her, were she a daughter of mine."

"Is Sarah Anne likely to have it dangerously?"

"I think she will. Is there any necessity for your going to the house just now, Mr. Godolphin?"

Thomas Godolphin smiled. "There is no necessity for my keeping away. I do not fear the fever any more than you do."

He passed into the garden as he spoke, and Mr. Snow drove away. Ethel saw him and came running out.

"Oh, Thomas, do not come in! do not come!"

His only answer was to take her upon his arm and enter. He threw open the drawing-room window, that as much air might circulate through the house as was possible, and stood at it with her, holding her before him.

"Ethel! what am I to do with you?"

"To do with me! What should you do with me, Thomas?"

"Do you know, my darling, that I cannot afford to let this danger touch you?"

"I am not afraid," she gently whispered.

He knew that: she had a brave, unselfish heart. But he was afraid for her, for he loved her with a jealous love: jealous of any evil that might come too near her.

"I should like to take you out of the house with me now, Ethel. I should like to take you far from this fever-tainted town. Will you come?"

She looked up at him with a smile, the color rising in her face. "How could I, Thomas?"

Anxious thoughts were passing through the mind of Thomas Godolphin. We cannot put aside the conveniences of life, though there are times when they press upon us with an iron weight. He would have given almost his own life to take Ethel from that house. But how was he to do it? No friend would be likely to receive her; not even his own sisters; they would have too much dread of the infection she might bring. He would fain have carried her off to some sea-breezed town, and watch over her and guard her there, until the danger should be over. None would have protected her more honorably than Thomas Godolphin. But, those conveniences that the world has to bow down to: how would the step have accorded with them? Another thought, little less available for common use, passed through his mind.

"Listen, Ethel," he whispered. "It would be but getting a license, and half an hour spent at All Souls' with Mr. Hastings. It could be all done, and you away with me before night-fall."

She scarcely understood his meaning. Then, as it dawned upon her, she bent her head and her blushing face, laughing at the wild improbability.

"Oh, Thomas! Thomas! you are only joking. What would people say?"

"Would it make any difference to us, what they said?"

"It could not be, Thomas," she whispered, seriously; "it is a vision impossible. Were all other things meet, how could I run away from my sister, on her bed of dangerous illness, to marry you?"

Ethel was right, and Thomas Godolphin felt that she was. The conveniences must be observed, no matter

at what cost. He held her fondly against his heart.

"If aught of ill should rise to you from your remaining here, I shall blame myself as long as life shall last. My love! my love!"

Mr. Godolphin could not linger. He must be back at the bank, for Saturday was their most busy day of all the week, it being market-day at Prior's Ash: though he had snatched a moment to quit it when the imperfect news reached him. George was in the private room alone when he entered. "Shall you be going to Lady Godolphin's Folly this evening, George?" he inquired.

"The Fates permitting," replied Mr. George, who was buried five fathom deep in business; though he would have preferred to be five fathom deep in pleasure. "Why?"

"You can tell my father that I am sorry not to be able to spend an hour with him, as I promised. Lady Godolphin will not thank me to be running from Lady Sarah's house to hers just now."

"Thomas," warmly spoke George, in an impulse of kindly feeling, "I do hope it will not extend itself to Ethel!"

"I hope not," fervently breathed Thomas Godolphin.

CHAPTER VI.

CHARLOTTE PAIN.

A FINE old door of oak, a heavy door, standing deep within a portico, inside which you might almost have driven a coach-and-six, introduced you to Ashlydyat. The hall was dark and small, the only light admitted to it being from mullioned windows of stained glass. Innumerable passages branched off from the hall; one peculiarity of Ashlydyat being that you could scarcely enter a single room in it, but you must first go down a passage, short or long, to get to it. Had the house been designed by any archi-

tect with a head upon his shoulders and a little common sense within it, he might have made a handsome mansion of spacious and noble rooms: as it was, the rooms were cramped and narrow, cornered and confined; and the good space was taken up by these worthless passages.

In the least sombre room of the house, one with a large modern window (put into it by Sir George Godolphin to please my lady, just before that whim came into her head to build the Folly), opening upon a side gravel walk, were two ladies, on the evening of this same Saturday. Were they sisters? They did not look like it: Charlotte Pain you have seen. She stood underneath the wax-lights of the chandelier, tall, commanding, dark, handsome; scarlet flowers in her hair, a scarlet bouquet in her corsage; her dress a rich silk of cream color with scarlet sprigs upon it. She had in her hand a small black dog of the King Charles species, holding him up to the lights, and laughing at his anger: he was snarling fractiously, whether at the lights or the position might be best known to his mistress; while at her feet barked and yelped an ugly Scotch terrier, probably because he was not also held up: for dogs are like men, and covet what they cannot get.

In a dress of pink gauze, with pretty pink cheeks, smooth features, and hazel eyes, her hair auburn, interlaced with pearls, and her height scarcely reaching to Miss Pain's shoulder, was Mrs. Verrall. She was younger than her sister: for sisters they were: a lady who passed through life with easy indifference, or appeared to do so, and called her husband "Verrall." She stood before the fire, one of those delicate white Indian screens in her hand, to shade her face from the blaze. The room was hot, and the large window had been thrown open. So calm was the night, that not a breath of air came in to stir the wax-lights: the wind, which you heard moaning round the rectory of All Souls' in the morning, worrying the leaves and dis-

pleasing Mrs. Hastings, had dropped with sundown to a dead calm.

"Charlotte, I think I shall make Verrall take me to town with him! The thought has just come into my mind."

Charlotte made no answer. Possibly she did not catch the words; for, the dogs were barking and she laughing louder than ever. Mrs. Verrall stamped her foot petulantly, and her voice rang through the room.

"Charlotte, then! do you hear me? Put that horrible little brute down: or I will ring for them to be taken away! One might as well keep a screaming cockatoo! I say I have a great mind to go up to town with Verrall."

"Verrall would not take you," responded Charlotte, putting her King Charles on the back of the terrier.

"Why do you think that?"

"He goes up for business only."

"It will be so dull for me, all alone!" complained Mrs. Verrall. "You in Scotland, he in London, and I moping myself to death in this gloomy Ashlydyat! I wish we had never taken it!"

Charlotte Pain bent her dark eyes in surprise upon her sister. "Since when have you found out that you do not like Ashlydyat?"

"Oh, I don't know. It is a gloomy place inside, especially if you contrast it with Lady Godolphin's Folly. And they are beginning to whisper of ghostly things being abroad on the Dark Plain!"

"For shame, Kate!" exclaimed Charlotte Pain. "Ghostly things! Oh, I see!—you were laughing."

"Is it not enough to make us all laugh—these tales of the Godolphins? But I shall convert it into a pretext for not being left by myself here, when you and Verrall are away. Why do you go, Charlotte?" Mrs. Verrall added, in a tone which had changed to marked significance. "It is waste of time."

The color heightened in Charlotte Pain's cheeks. She would not take the innuendo. "I never was in Scot-

lard, and shall like the visit," she said, picking up the King Charles again. "I enjoy fine scenery: you do not care for it."

"Oh," said Mrs. Verrall, "it is the scenery that draws you, is it? Take you care, Charlotte."

"Care of what?"

"Shall I tell you? You must not fly into one of your tempers and pull my hair. You are growing too fond of George Godolphin."

Charlotte Pain gave no trace of "flying into a temper;" she remained perfectly cool and calm. "Well?" was all she said, her lip curling.

"If it would bring you any good; if it would end in your becoming Mrs. George, I should say, *well*; go into it with your whole heart and energy. But it will not end so: and your time and plans are wasted."

"Has he told you so much?" ironically asked Charlotte.

"Nonsense! There was one in possession of the field before you, Charlotte,—if my observation goes for any thing. *She* will win the race; you will not even be in at the distance chair. I speak of Maria Hastings."

"You speak of what you know nothing," carelessly answered Charlotte Pain, a self-satisfied smile upon her lips.

"Very well. When it is all over, and you find the time *has* been wasted, do not say I never warned you. George Godolphin may be a prize worth entering the lists for; I do not say he is not: but there is no chance of your winning him."

Charlotte Pain tossed the dog upwards and caught him as he descended, a strange look of triumph on her brow.

"And—Charlotte," went on Mrs. Verrall, in a lower tone, "there is a proverb, you know, about two stools. We *may* fall to the ground if we try to sit upon them both at once. How would Dolf like this expedition to Scotland, handsome George being in it?"

Charlotte's eyes flashed now. "I care no more for Dolf than I care for—not half so much as I care for this

poor little brute. Don't bring up Dolf to me, Kate."

"As you please. I would not mix myself up with your private affairs for the world. Only a looker-on sometimes sees more than those engaged in the play."

Crossing the apartment, Mrs. Verrall traversed the passage that led from it, and opened the door of another room. There sat her husband at the dessert-table, drinking his wine alone, and smoking a cigar. He was a slight man, double the age of his wife, his hair and whiskers yellow, and his eyes set deep in his head; rather a good-looking man on the whole, but a very silent one. "I want to go to London with you," said Mrs. Verrall.

"You can't," he answered.

She advanced to the table and sat down near him. "There's Charlotte going one way, and you another—"

"Don't stop Charlotte," he interrupted, with a meaning nod.

"And I must be left in the house by myself; to the ghosts and dreams and shadows they are inventing about that Dark Plain. I will go with you, Verrall."

"I should not take you with me to save the ghosts running off with you," was Mr. Verrall's answer, as he pressed the ashes from his cigar on a pretty shell, set in gold. "I go up *incog.* this time."

"Then I'll fill the house with guests," she petulantly said.

"Fill it, and welcome, if you like, Kate," he replied. "But to go to London, you must wait for another opportunity."

"What a hateful thing business is! I wish it had never been invented!"

"A great many more wish the same,—and have more cause to wish it than you," he dryly answered. "Is tea ready?"

Mrs. Verrall returned to the room she had left, to order it in. Charlotte Pain was then standing outside the large window, leaning against its frame, the King Charles lying quietly

in her arms, and her own ears on the alert, for she thought she heard advancing footsteps: and they seemed to be stealthy ones. The thought—or, perhaps, the wish—that it might be George Godolphin, stealing up to surprise her, flashed into her mind. She bent her head and stroked the dog, in the prettiest unconsciousness of the nearing footsteps.

A hand was laid upon her shoulder. "Charlotte!"

She cried out. A genuine, sharp cry of dismay, dropped the King Charles, and bounded into the room. The intruder followed her.

"Why, Dolf!" uttered Mrs. Verrall in much astonishment. "Is it you?"

"It is not my ghost," replied the gentleman, holding out his hand. He was a little man with fair hair, Mr. Rodolf Pain, cousin to the two ladies. "Did I alarm you, Charlotte?"

"Alarm me!" she angrily uttered. "You must have sprung out of the earth."

"I have sprung from the railway station. Where is Verrall?"

"Why have you come down so unexpectedly?" exclaimed Mrs. Verrall.

"To see Verrall. I go back to-morrow."

"Verrall goes up to-morrow night."

"I know he does. And that is why I have come."

"You might have waited to see him in London," said Charlotte, her equanimity not yet restored.

"It was necessary for me to see him before he reached London. Where shall I find him, Mrs. Verrall?"

"In the dining-room," Mrs. Verrall replied. "What can you want with him, in this hurry?"

"Business," laconically replied Rodolf Pain, as he quitted the room in search of Mr. Verrall.

It was not the only interruption. Ere two minutes had elapsed, Lady Godolphin was shown in, causing Mrs. Verrall and her sister nearly as much surprise as did the last intruder. She had walked over from the Folly,

attended by a footman, and some agitation peeped out through her usual courtly suavity of manner.

"Can you be ready to start with us to-morrow morning instead of Monday?" she demanded of Charlotte Pain.

"To-morrow will be Sunday!" returned Charlotte.

"The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath: remember who it was spoke that to us," said Lady Godolphin, with some sternness. "It is the argument I have just been obliged to bring forward to Sir George. I did not imagine you were so scrupulous."

She laid a stress upon the "you," and a smile crossed Charlotte Pain's lips: Charlotte was certainly not troubled with over-scrupulousness upon these points.

"I do not countenance Sunday traveling, if other days can be made use of," continued Lady Godolphin. "But there are cases where it is not only necessary, but justifiable: when we are glad to feel the value of those Divine words. The fever has broken out again, and I shall make use of to-morrow to get away from it. We start in the morning."

"I shall be ready and willing," replied Charlotte.

"It has appeared at Lady Sarah Grame's," added Lady Godolphin: "one of the most unlikely homes it might have been expected to visit. After this, none of us can feel safe. Were that fever to attack Sir George, his life, in his present reduced state, would not be worth an hour's purchase."

Declining the invitation to remain, Lady Godolphin prepared to leave again, after giving a few moments, with Charlotte Pain, to the settlement of preliminaries for the morning. The dread of the fever had been strong upon her from the first; but never had it been so keen as now. Some are given to this dread in an unwonted degree: while the epidemic lasts (of whatever nature it may be) they live in a constant, racking state of fear, of

pain. It is the death they fear,—the being sent violently on the unknown life to come. I know but of one remedy,—to make peace with God: death or life are alike then. Lady Godolphin had not found it.

"Will Mr. Hastings permit his daughter to travel on a Sunday?" exclaimed Mrs. Verrall, the idea suddenly occurring to her, as Lady Godolphin was leaving.

"That is my business," was my lady's frigid answer. It has been said that she brooked not interference in the slightest degree.

It certainly could not be called the business of Mr. Hastings. For my lady and Maria, and Sir George and Charlotte Pain, were far away the next morning from Prior's Ash, before he received an inkling of the matter. That graceless George—much he cared about the sin of Sunday traveling!—attended them a few stations forward, getting back at night.

"If I had but known of this, what a pretext it would have been for keeping Maria!" mentally uttered the dismayed rector.

CHAPTER VII.

BROOMHEAD.

THE contrast between them was great. You could see it most remarkably as they sat together: both were beautiful, but of a different type of beauty. There are some people—and they bear a very large proportion of the whole—to whom the human countenance is as a sealed book: there are others for whom that book stands open to its every page. The capacity of reading character,—what is it? where does it lie? Phrenologists call it, not inaptly, comparison. There stands a man before you,—a stranger,—seen now for the first time; and as you glance upon him you involuntarily shrink within yourself, and trench imaginary walls round about you, and

say, That man is a bad man. Your eyes fall upon another,—equally a stranger, until that moment,—and your honest heart flows out to him; you could extend to him the hand of confidence there and then, for that man's countenance is an index of his nature, and you *know* that you may trust him to the death. In what part of the face does this tell-tale index seat itself? In the eyes? in the mouth? in the features separately? or in the whole? Certainly in the whole. To judge of temper alone, the eye and mouth—provided you take them in repose—are sure indications; but to judge of what a man is, you must look to the whole. You don't know precisely where to look for it any more than do those kno^y who cannot see it at all: you cannot say it lies in the forehead, or the eyebrows, or the eyes, or the chin: you do see it,—and that is all you can tell. Beauty and ugliness, in themselves, have nothing to do with it: an ugly countenance may, and often does, bear its own innate goodness, as certain as that one of beauty sometimes does its own repulsion. Were there certain unerring signs to judge by, all the human race might become readers of character; but that will never be so long as the world shall last. In like manner, as we cannot tell precisely where nature's marks lie, so are we unable to tell where lies the capacity to read them. Is it a faculty? or is it instinct? This I do know: that it is one of the great gifts of God. Where the power exists in an eminent degree, rely upon it its possessor is never deceived in his estimation of character. It is born with him into the world. As a little child he has his likes and dislikes of persons,—and sometimes may get whipped for expressing them too strongly: as he grows, the faculty—instinct,—call it what you will—is ever in exercise;—at rest when he sleeps,—never else. Those who do not possess the gift (no disparagement to them,—they may possess others equally or more valuable) cavil at it,—laugh at it,—do not believe in it. Read what people are

by the face? Moonshine!—*they* know better. Others, who allow the fact, have talked of “reducing it to a science,”—whatever that may mean,—and of teaching it to the world, as we teach the classics to our boys. It may be done, say they. Possibly. I am not going to dispute it. We all acknowledge the wonders of this most wonderful age. Fishes are made to talk; fleas to comport themselves as gentlemen; monkeys are discovered to be men,—or men, monkeys,—which is it? a shirt is advertised to be made complete in four minutes (buttons, warranted fast, included) by the new sewing-machine; we send ourselves in photograph to make morning-calls; the opposite ends of the world are brought together by electric telegraph; chloroform has rendered the surgeon's knife something rather agreeable than otherwise; we are made quite at home with “spirits,” and ghosts are reduced to a theory;—not to speak of those other discoveries connected with the air, earth, and water, which it would require an F.R.S. to descant upon,—wonderful discoveries of a wonderful age! Compare the last fifty years with the previous fifty,—when people made their wills before going to London, and flocked to the show at the fair and saw the learned pig point out the identical young woman who had had the quarrel with her sweetheart the previous Sunday afternoon! It is not my province to dispute these wonders. They may, or may not, be facts; but when you come to talk of reducing this great gift to a “science,” the result will be a failure. Try and do so. Make a school for it; give lectures; write books; beat it into heads: and then say to your pupils, “Now you are finished: go out into the world and use your eyes and read your fellow-men.” And the pupil will, perhaps, think he does read them; but as the first deduction he draws, so will be the last,—wrong. Neither art nor science can teach it; neither man nor woman can make it theirs by any amount of labor: where the faculty is not theirs by divine gift,

It cannot be made to exist by human skill.

A reader of character would have noted the contrast between those two young ladies as they stood there: he would have trusted the one; he would not have trusted the other. And yet Charlotte Pain had her good qualities: kind-hearted in the main, liberal-natured, pleasant-tempered, of a spirit firm and resolute, fit to battle with the world, and to make good her own way in it: but not truthful; not high principled; not one whom I, had I been George Godolphin, would have chosen for my wife, or for my bosom friend.

Maria Hastings was eminent in what Charlotte Pain lacked. Of rare integrity; of high principle; gentle and refined; incapable of deceit; and with a loving nature that could be true unto death! But she was a very child in the ways of the world; timid, irresolute, unfit to battle with its cares; swayed easily by those she loved; and all too passionately fond of George Godolphin. Look at them both now,—Charlotte, with her marked, brilliant features; her pointed chin, telling of self-will; her somewhat full, red lips; the pose of her head upon her tall, firm form; her large eyes, made to dazzle, more than to attract: her perfectly self-possessed, not to say free manners;—all told of power; but not of innate refinement. Maria had too much of this refinement,—if such a thing may be said of a young and gentle lady. She was finely and sensitively organized; considerate and gentle. It would be impossible for Maria Hastings to hurt wilfully the feelings of a fellow-creature: to the poorest beggar in the street she would have been courteous, considerate, almost humble; not so much as a word of scorn could she cast to another, even in her inmost heart. The very formation of her hands would betray how sensitive and refined was her nature; and that is another thing which bears its own character,—the hand,—if you know how to read it. Her hands were of exceeding beauty,—long, slen-

der, taper fingers, of delicate aspect in a physical point of view. Every motion of those hands—and they were ever restless—was as a word; every unconscious, nervous movement of the frail, weak-looking fingers had its peculiar characteristic. Maria Hastings had been accused of being vain of her hands; of displaying them more than was needful; but the accusation, entirely untrue, was made by those who understood her but little, and her hands less. Such hands are rare: and it is as well they are so: for they indicate a nature far removed from the common,—timid, intellectual, and painfully sensitive, which the rude world can neither understand, nor—perhaps—love. The gold too much refined is not fitted for ordinary uses. Charlotte Pain's hands were widely different: firm, plump, white; not small, and never moving unconsciously of themselves.

These pretty hands resting upon her knee, sat Maria Hastings, doing nothing. Maria—I grieve to have it to say of her in this very utilitarian age—was rather addicted to doing nothing. In her home, the rectory, Maria had got reproved on that score more than on any other. It is ever so with those who live much in the inward life. Maria would fall into a train of thought—and be idle. She was not very strong of frame, and to such, rest is a boon inconceivable. The country lad said, if he were king, he would sit upon a stile and eat fat bacon all day. It was his best notion of enjoyment. Charlotte Pain's might have been, the galloping over the country on a thorough-bred steed, George Godolphin by her side: or some other cavalier equally attractive in himself, and equally given to display admiration for her attractions. Maria's ideal, would have been, to sit under the shade of trees, sheltered from the noonday sun, or by the trellised honeysuckle, in the waning twilight: at rest; doing nothing; except listening to the sweet words of George Godolphin. For her there was "but one beloved face on earth;" and that one

she would have liked to be "always shining on her."

Master Reginald Hastings would have lost his bet,—that Godolphin would be in Scotland a week after they got there,—had he found anybody to take it. Ten or eleven days had elapsed, and no George had come, and no news of his intention to come. It was not for *this*, to be moped to death in an old Scotch country-house, that Charlotte Pain had accepted the invitation of Lady Godolphin. Careless George—careless as to the import any of his words might bear—had said to her, when they were talking of Scotland, "I wish you were to be of the party,—to help us while away the dull days." Mr. George had spoken in gallantry—he was too much inclined so to speak; not only to Charlotte—without ever dreaming that his wish would be fulfilled literally. But, when Lady Godolphin afterwards gave the invitation,—Sir George had remarked aloud at the family dinner-table that Miss Pain fished for it,—Charlotte accepted it with undisguised pleasure. In point of fact, Mr. George, had the choice been given him, would have preferred having Maria Hastings to himself there.

But he did not come. Eleven days, and no George Godolphin; they were still alone. Charlotte began to lay mental plans for the arrival of some sudden telegraphic message, demanding her immediate return to Prior's Ash; and Maria could only hope, and look, and long in secret.

It was a gloomy day; not rainy, but enveloped in mist, almost as bad as rain. They had gone out together, after luncheon, the two young ladies, but the weather drove them in again. Charlotte was restless and cross. She stirred the fire as if she had a spite against it; she dashed off a few bars at the piano, on which instrument she was a skillful player; she cut half the leaves of a new periodical and then flung it from her; she admired herself before the pier-glass; she sat down opposite Maria Hastings and her calm stillness; and now she

jumped up again and violently rang the bell, to order her desk to be brought. Maria roused herself from her reverie.

"Charlotte, what is the matter? One would think you had St. Vitus's dance."

"So I have,—if to shake all over with fidgets is to have it. How you can sit so calm, so unmoved, is a marvel to me. Maria, if I were to be another ten days in this house, I should go mad."

"Why did you come?"

"Come! I thought it might be a pleasant change. Ashlydyat gets gloomy sometimes. How was I to know my lady led so quiet a life here? She was always talking of 'Broom-head!' I could not possibly suppose it to be a dull place like this?"

"It is not a dull place, in itself. The house and grounds are charming!"

"It is dull for me. I count by people, not by fine houses and praised-up scenery. The few people who come to dine here, or to call, are a set of old muffs,—neither more nor less. And my lady enjoys their society better than that of any of her friends round Ashlydyat."

"It is easy to be accounted for," said Maria. "They are her old, old friends: she lived amidst them for years; all during the period of her first marriage. I think to come again amongst old friends from whom we live separated, we must feel like a child going home from school."

"Oh dear!" uttered Charlotte. "I wonder what fogs were sent for? To plague us, I conclude."

"So do I," laughed Maria. "I should have finished that sketch, but for the fog."

"No saddle-horses!" went on Charlotte. "I shall forget how to ride. I never heard of such a thing as a country-house without saddle-horses. Where was the use of bringing my new cap and habit? Only to get them crushed!"

Maria seemed to have relapsed into thought. She made no reply. Presently Charlotte began again.

"I wish I had my dogs here! Lady Godolphin would not extend the invitation even to King Charlie. She said she did not like dogs. What a heathen she must be!"

"I do not like them," interposed Maria.

Charlotte's eyes flashed. "I saw, once, a virago of a woman follow a poor half-starved white dog out of a house, and she beat him till she broke his back. I suppose she did not 'like' dogs!"

"Oh, Charlotte—how dreadful! Had I seen that, I think I should never have been able to get it out of my sight! I cannot understand how any one can be cruel to dogs."

"You have just boasted that you don't like them," said Charlotte, ironically, "Why don't you?"

"I suppose chiefly because I have not been made familiar with them," replied Maria. "Papa has never suffered a dog within the walls of our house. Mind, Charlotte; I do not say I dislike dogs; I only say I do not like them. I neither like them nor dislike them."

"Oh! dogs are one of Mr. Hastings's prejudices, are they?" mocked handsome Charlotte. "I know he has some curious ones."

"Circumstances have made papa afraid of dogs,—and he naturally avoids contact with them," observed Maria, her voice insensibly becoming low. "One whom he loved dearly in early life, his companion at school, his friend at college, died from the bite of a dog."

"Some stray, wretched, homeless animal goaded to madness by cruelty," said Charlotte. "With a back only half broken perhaps."

"Not a stray animal; not wretched; it was his own pet dog, which he had reared from a puppy."

"I'd rather pet a dog than pet a child," exclaimed Charlotte. "I wish I could see my darling pet, King Charlie! Kate never mentioned him once in her letter this morning."

The words aroused Maria to animation. "Did you receive a letter this

morning from Prior's Ash? You did not tell me."

"Margery brought it to my bedroom. It came last night, as I fancy, and lay in the letter-box. I do not think Sir George ought to keep that letter-box entirely under his own control," continued Charlotte. "He grows forgetful. Some evenings I know it is never looked at."

"I have not observed that Sir George is forgetful," dissented Maria.

"You observe nothing. I say that Sir George declines daily: both bodily and mentally."

"Bodily and mentally!" echoed Maria, in a reproving tone. "Charlotte, what random things you say! A stranger, hearing you, might conclude Sir George was childish or insane."

"The mental powers may grow weak and decay, but not always to insanity. I do see a great difference in Sir George: even in the short period that we have been here. He is not the man he was."

"He has his business letters regularly; and answers them."

"Quite a farce, the sending them," mocked Charlotte. "Thomas Godolphin is ultra filial. But—to come back to our starting-point—I think Mrs. Verrall's letter must have lain in the box a day; if not two. She is sure to have written it on Sunday. She'd never get through the day's weariness, she says, but for paying off arrears of correspondence."

Maria glanced quickly up; a reproachful glance in her eye, a reproachful word hovering on her lips. She did not speak it. "What news does Mrs. Verrall give you?" she inquired.

"Not much. Sarah Anne Grame is out of immediate danger, she says, and the fever has attacked two or three others."

"In Lady Sarah's house?"

"Nonsense! No. That sickly girl, Sarah Anne, took it, because I suppose she could not help it: but there's not much fear of its spreading to the rest of the house. If they had been

going to have it, it would have shown its effects on them ere this. It has crept on to those pests of cottages by the Pollards. The Bonds are down with it."

"The worst spot it could have got to!" exclaimed Maria. "Those cottages are unhealthy at the best of times."

"They had a dinner-party on Saturday," continued Charlotte.

"At the cottages?"

Charlotte laughed. "At Ashlydyat. The Godolphins were there. At least, she mentioned Bessy, and your chosen cavalier, Mr. George.

Maria's cheek flushed crimson. Charlotte Pain was rather fond of this kind of satire. Had she believed there was any thing serious between George Godolphin and Maria, she would have eaten her tongue off rather than allude to it. It was not Charlotte's intention to spare him to Maria Hastings.

"I would give something," Charlotte suddenly resumed, in a dreamy tone, "to know what is keeping him at Prior's Ash. Kate says not a word about his leaving it: therefore I conclude he has changed his mind, as to coming here."

Maria listened eagerly. In her own letters from home, George Godolphin was not mentioned: not one of the inmates of it, Grace, perhaps, excepted, had ever glanced to the suspicion that he cared for Maria, or she for him. Not coming! her heart sank within her.

Charlotte Pain unlocked her desk, which had been brought; read over a letter,—that Maria supposed might be the one in question,—and sat down to answer it. Maria drew nearer to the fire, and sat looking into it, her cheek leaning on her hand: sat there until the dusk of the winter's afternoon fell upon the room. She turned to her companion.

"Can you see, Charlotte?"

"Scarcely. I have just finished."

A few minutes, and Charlotte folded her letters. Two. The one was directed to Mrs. Verrall, Ashlydyat;

the other to Rodolf Pain, Esquire, London.

"I shall go up to dress," she said, locking her desk.

"There's plenty of time," returned Maria. "I wonder where Sir George and Lady Godolphin are! They did not intend to stay out so late."

"Oh, when those ancient codgers get together, talking of their ancient times and doings, they take no more heed how the time goes, than we do at a ball," carelessly spoke Charlotte.

Maria laughed. "Lucky for you, Charlotte, that Lady Godolphin is not within hearing. 'Ancient codgers!'"

Charlotte left the room, carrying her letters with her. Maria sat on, some considerable time,—and then it occurred to her to look at her watch. A quarter to five.

A quarter to five! Had she been asleep? No, only dreaming. She started up, threw wide the door, and was passing swiftly into the dark ante-chamber. The house had not been lighted, and the only light came from the fire, behind Maria. Showing out herself clearly enough, but rendering that ante-chamber particularly dark to the eyes. Little wonder, then, that she gave a scream when she found herself caught in somebody's arms, against whom she had nearly run.

"Is it you, Sir George? I beg your pardon."

Not Sir George. Sir George would not have held her to him with that impassioned fervor. Sir George would not have taken those fond kisses from her lips. It was another George, just come in from his long day's journey. He pressed his face, cold from the fresh night air, upon her warm one. "My dearest! I knew you would be the first to welcome me!"

Dark enough around, it was still; but a light, as of some sunny Eden, illumined the heart of Maria Hastings. The shock of joy was indeed great. Every vein was throbbing, every pulse tingling, and George Godolphin, had

he never before been sure that her deep and entire love was his, must have known it then.

A servant was heard approaching with lights. George Godolphin turned to the fire, and Maria turned with him.

"Did any of you expect me?" he inquired.

"Oh no!" impulsively answered Maria. "I can scarcely now believe that it is you, in reality."

He looked at her and laughed,—his gay laugh: as much as to say that he had given her a tolerable proof of his reality. She stood, in her pretty timid manner, before the fire, her eyelids drooping, and the flame lighting up her fair face.

"Is my father at home?" he asked, taking off his overcoat. He had walked from the railway station a mile or two distant.

"He went out with Lady Godolphin this morning to pay a visit to some old friends. I thought they would have returned long before this."

"Is he getting strong, Maria?"

Maria thought of what Charlotte Pain had said, and hesitated. "He appears to me to be better than when we left Prior's Ash. But he is far from strong."

The servant finished lighting the chandelier, and retired. George Godolphin watched the door close, and then drew Maria in front of him, gazing down at her.

"Let me look at you, my darling! Are you glad to see me?"

Glad to see him! The tears nearly welled up with the intensity of her emotion. "I had begun to think you were not coming at all," she said, in a low tone. "Charlotte Pain had a letter from Mrs. Verrall this morning, in which you were mentioned as——"

Charlotte herself interrupted the conclusion of the sentence. She came in, ready for dinner. George turned to greet her, his manner warm, his hands outstretched.

"Margery said Mr. George was here! I did not believe her," cried Charlotte, resigning her hands to him.

"Did you come on the telegraph-wires?"

"They would not have brought me quickly enough to *your* presence," cried Mr. George.

Charlotte laughed gayly. "I was just prophesying you would not come at all. Mrs. Verrall did not give me the information that you were about to start, amidst her other items of intelligence. Besides, I know you are rather addicted to forgetting your promises."

"What items had Mrs. Verrall to urge against me?" demanded George.

"I forget them now. Nothing, I believe. Is Prior's Ash alive still?"

"It was, when I left it."

"And the fever, George?" inquired Maria.

"Fever? Oh, I don't know much about it."

"As if fevers were in his way!" ironically cried Charlotte Pain. "He troubles himself no more about fevers, than does Lady Godolphin."

"Than Lady Godolphin would like to do, I suppose you mean, Miss Pain," he rejoined.

Maria was looking at him wistfully, —almost reproachfully. He saw it, and turned to her with a smile. "Has it in truth attacked the cottages down by the Pollards?" she asked.

George nodded. He was not so ignorant as he appeared. "Poor Bond had it first; and now two of his children are attacked. I understand Mr. Hastings declares it is a judgment upon the town for not looking better after the hovels and the drainage."

"Has Bond recovered?" asked Maria.

"No."

"Not recovered?" she exclaimed, quickly.

"He is dead, Maria."

She clasped her hands, shocked at the news. "Dead! Leaving that large helpless family! And Sarah Ann Grame is out of danger?"

"From the violence of the fever. But she is in so dangerously weak a state from its effects, that it will be

next to a miracle if she recovers. Lady Sarah is half out of her mind. She had prayers put up for Sarah Anne on Sunday. Pretty Ethel has escaped! to the delight of Prior's Ash in general, and of Thomas in particular. What carriage is that?" suddenly broke off George, as the sound of one was heard.

It proved to be Sir George's, bringing home himself and my lady. George hastened to meet them as they entered the hall, his handsome face glowing, his brown chestnut hair waving, his hands held out. "My dear father!"

The old knight, with a surprised cry of gladness, caught the hands, and pressed them to his heart. My lady advanced with her welcome. She bent her tinted cheeks forwards, by way of greeting, and Mr. George touched it with his delicate lips,—lightly, as became its softened bloom.

"So you have found your way to us, George! I expected you would have done so before."

"Did you, madam?"

"Did we!" cried the knight, taking up the word. "Listen to that vain George! He pretends to ignore the fact that there was an attraction here. Had a certain young lady remained at Prior's Ash, I expect you would not have given us much of your company at Broomhead. If Miss Charlotte——"

"Did you call me, Sir George?" interrupted Charlotte, tripping forward from the back of the hall, where she and Maria stood, out of sight, but within hearing.

"No, my dear, I did not call you," replied Sir George Godolphin.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SNAKE IN THE GRASS.

SEATED on a camp-stool, amidst a lovely bit of woodland scenery, was Maria Hastings. The day, beautifully bright, was warm as one in Septem-

ber,—delightful for the pleasure-seekers at Broomhead, but bad for the fever at Prior's Ash. Maria was putting some finishing touches to a sketch,—she had taken many since she came,—and Mr. George Godolphin and Charlotte Pain watched her as they pleased, or took sauntering strolls to a distance.

Lady Godolphin was as fond of Broomhead as the Godolphins were of Ashlydyat. Certainly Broomhead was the more attractive home of the two,—a fine house of exquisite taste, with modern rooms and modern embellishments: and when she invited the two young ladies to accompany her on a visit to it, she was actuated as much by a sense of exultation at exhibiting the place to them, as by a desire for their companionship,—though she did like and desire the companionship. Lady Godolphin—who never read and never worked, in short, never did any thing—was obliged to have friends with her to dissipate her ennui and cheat time. She liked young ladies best; for they did not interfere with her own will, and were rarely exacting visitors.

But she required less of this companionship at Broomhead. There she knew everybody, and everybody knew her. She was sufficiently familiar with the smallest and poorest cottage to take an interest in its ill-doings and its short-comings,—at least as much interest as it was possible to the nature of Lady Godolphin to take. Old acquaintances dropped in without ceremony, and stayed the morning with her, gossiping of times past and present; or she dropped into their houses, and stayed with them. Of gayety there was none: Sir George's state of health forbade it: and in this quiet social intercourse—which Charlotte Pain held in especial contempt—the young visitors were not wanted. Altogether they were much at liberty, and went roaming where they would, under the protection of Mr. George Godolphin.

He had now been a week at Broomhead,—flirting with Charlotte, giving

stolen minutes to Maria. A looker-on might have decided that Miss Pain was the gentleman's chief magnet of attraction; for, in public, his attentions were principally given to her. She may be pardoned for estimating them at more than they were worth; but she could very well have welcomed any friendly wind that would have come to waft away Maria, and to keep her away. They knew—those two girls—that their mutual intercourse was of a hollow nature: that their paraded friendship, their politeness, was rotten at the core. Each was jealous of the other; and the one subject which filled their minds was never alluded to in their speech. Either might have affirmed to the other, "You are aware that I watch you and George: my jealous eyes are upon your every movement, my jealous ears are ever open." But these avowals are not made in social life; and Charlotte and Maria observed studied courtesy, making believe to be mutually unconscious,—knowing all the while that the consciousness existed in a remarkable degree. It was an artificial state of things.

"How dark you are making those trees!" exclaimed Charlotte Pain.

Maria paused, pencil in hand: glanced at the trees opposite, and at the trees on paper. "Not too dark," she said. "The grove is a heavy one."

"What's that queer-looking thing in the corner? It is like a half-moon coming down to pay us a visit."

Maria held out her sketch at arm's distance,—laughing merrily: "You do not understand perspective, Charlotte. Look at it now."

"Not I," said Charlotte. "I understand nothing of the work. They tried me at it when I was a child, but I never could be got to make a straight line without the ruler. After all, where's the use of it? The best-made sketch cannot rival its model,—nature."

"But the sketches serve to remind us of familiar places when we are beyond their reach," was Maria's answer. "I like drawing."

"Maria draws well," observed George Godolphin, from his swinging perch on the branch of a neighboring tree.

She looked up at him almost gratefully. "This will be one of the best sketches I have taken here," she said. "It is so thoroughly picturesque: and that farm-house beneath the hill serves to give life to the picture."

Charlotte Pain cast her eyes upon the house in the distance over the green field, to which she had not before vouchsafed a glance. A shade of contempt crossed her face:

"Call *that* a farm-house! I should say it was a tumble-down old cottage."

"It is large for a cottage: and it has a barn and sheds around it," returned Maria. "I conclude it was a farm some time."

"It is not inhabited," said Charlotte.

"Oh yes it is. There is a woman standing at the door. I have put her in my sketch."

"And her pipe also?" cried out George.

"Her pipe?"

George took his own cigar from his mouth as he answered: "She is smoking—that woman—a short pipe."

Maria shaded her eyes with her hand, and gazed attentively. "I—really—do—think—she—is!" she exclaimed, slowly. "What a strange thing!"

"A Welshwoman married to a Scotch husband, possibly," suggested Charlotte. "The Welsh smoke."

"I'll make her a Welshwoman," said Maria, gayly, "with a man's coat, and a man's hat. But there's—there's another now. George! it is Margery!"

"Yes," said Mr. George, composedly. "I saw her go in half an hour ago. How smart she is! She must be paying morning-visits."

They laughed at this, and watched Margery. A staid woman of middle age, who had been maid to the late Mrs. Godolphin. Margery dressed plainly, but she certainly did look

smart to-day, as the sun's dazzling rays fell upon her. The sun was unusually bright, and Charlotte Pain remarked it, saying it made her eyes ache.

"Suspiciously bright," observed George Godolphin.

"Suspiciously?"

He flirited the ashes from his cigar with his finger. "Suspicious of a storm," he said. "We shall have it ere long."

"Do you think so?"

He pointed his hand toward the edge of the horizon. "See those clouds. They look small, inoffensive; but they mean mischief."

Charlotte Pain strolled away over the meadow toward the cross path on which Margery was advancing. George Godolphin leaped from his seat, apparently with the intention of following her. But first of all he approached Maria, and bent to look at her progress.

"Make the farm—as you called it—very conspicuous, Maria, if you are going to reserve the sketch as a memento," said he.

"Is it not a farm?"

"It was, once; until idleness suffered it to drop through."

"Why should I make it particularly conspicuous?" she continued.

There was no reply, and she looked quickly up. A peculiar expression, one which she did not understand, sat upon his face.

"If we had a mind to cheat the world, Maria, we might do so, by paying a visit to that house?"

"In what way?"

"I might take you in Maria Hastings, and bring you out Mrs. George Godolphin."

"What do you mean?" she uttered, completely puzzled.

Mr. George laughed. "The man who lives there, Sandy Bray, has made more couples one than a rustic parson. Some people call him a public nuisance: others say he is a convenience, it being three miles to the nearest kirk. He goes by the nickname of Minister Bray. Many a

lad and lassie have stolen in there, under the cover of the glimmering twilight, and in five minutes have come forth again, married, the world being none the wiser."

"Is it the place they call Gretna Green?" inquired Maria, in much astonishment.

"No," laughed he; "it is not Gretna Green. Only a place of the same description, equally serviceable."

"But such marriages cannot stand good!"

"Indeed they do. You have surely heard of the Scotch laws?"

"I have heard that anybody can marry people in Scotland. I have heard that the simple declaration of saying you take each other for man and wife constitutes a marriage."

"Yes; if said before a witness. Would you like to try it, Maria?"

The color flushed into her face as she bent it over her drawing. She smiled at the joke, simply shaking her head by way of answer. And Mr. George Godolphin went off, laughing, lighting another cigar as he walked. Overtaking Charlotte Pain just as Margery came up, he accosted the latter.

"How grand you are, Margery! What's agate?"

"Grand!" uttered Margery. "Who says it? What is there grand about me?"

"Thatshawl displays as many colors as the kaleidoscope. We thought it was a rainbow coming along. Did it arrive express in a parcel last night from Paisley?"

"It isn't me that's got money to spend upon parcels!" retorted Margery. "I have too many claims a dragging my purse at both ends, for that."

A faithful servant was Margery, in spite of her hard features, and her hard speech. Of scant ceremony she had always been, and of scant ceremony she would remain; in fact, she was given to treat the younger branches of the Godolphins, Mr. George included, very much as she

had treated them when they were children. They knew her sterling worth, and they did not quarrel with her plain manners.

"When you have got half a dozen children a pulling at your tail, 'I want this!' from one, and 'I want that!' from another, and the same cry running through the lot, it isn't much money you can keep to spend on shawls," resumed Margery.

George Godolphin enjoyed his joke at Margery, rarely letting slip an opportunity of teasing her. At times they came to an open rupture.

"Half a dozen children!" he exclaimed, lifting his hands in awe. "What an avowal for a single woman!"

"Single women often have more children than married ones, as far as the cost of 'em goes," cried Margery, who altogether appeared too much put out to care for any thing said by George. "I know I have found it so. I was a fool to come here; that's what I was! When the master said to me, 'You had better come with us, Margery,' I ought to have answered, 'No, Sir George, I'm better stopping away.'"

"Well, what is the grievance, Margery?" George asked, while Charlotte Pain turned from one to the other with curiosity.

"Why, they are on at me for money, that's what it is, Mr. George. My lady sent for me this morning to say she intended to call and see Selina to-day. Of course, I knew what that meant,—that I was to go and give 'em a hint to have things tidy,—for, if there's one thing my lady won't do, it is to put her foot into a pigsty. So I clapped on my shawl, that you are laughing at, and went. There was nothing the matter with the place, for a wonder; but there was with them. Selina, she's in bed, ill,—and if she frets as she's fretting now, she won't get out of it in a hurry. Why did she marry the fellow? It does make me so vexed."

"What has she to fret about?" continued George.

"What does she always have to fret about?" retorted Margery. "His laziness, and them children's ill-doings. They go roaming about the country, here, there, and everywhere, after work, as they say, after places; and then they get into trouble and untold-of worry, and come home or send home for money to help them out of it! One of them, Nick—and a good name for him, say I!—must be off into Wales to them relations of Bray's; and he has been at some mischief there, and is in prison for it, and is now committed to take his trial. And the old woman has walked all the way here to get funds from them, to pay for his defence. The news has half killed Selina."

"I said she was a Welshwoman," interrupted Charlotte Pain. "She was smoking, was she not, Margery?"

"She's smoking a filthy short pipe," wrathfully returned Margery. "But for that, I should have said she was a decent body,—although it's next to impossible to make out her tongue. She puts in ten words of Welsh to two of English. Of course they have got no money to furnish for it; it wouldn't be them if they had; so they are wanting to get it out of me. Fifteen or twenty pounds! My word! They'd like me to end my days in the work-house."

"You might turn a deaf ear, Margery," said George.

"I know I might: and many a hundred times have I vowed I would," returned Margery. "But there's she in her bed, poor thing, sobbing and moaning, and asking if Nick is to be abandoned quite. The worse a lad turns out, the more a mother clings to him,—as it seems to me. Let me be here, or let me be at Ashlydyat, I have no peace for their wants. By word of mouth or by letter they are on at me."

"If 'Nick' has got a father, why can he not supply him?" asked Charlotte.

"It's a sensible question, Miss Pain," said the woman. "Nick's father is one of them stinging-nettles that only encumber the world, doing no good for themselves nor for anybody

beside. 'Minister' Bray, indeed! it ought to be something else, I think. Many a one has had cause to rue the hour that he 'ministered' for 'em!"

"How does he minister?—what do you mean?" wondered Charlotte.

"He marries folks; that's his ne'er-do-well occupation, Miss Pain. Give him a five-shilling piece, and he'd marry a boy to his grandmother. I'm Scotch by nativity,—though it's not much that I have lived in the land,—but I do say, that, to suffer such laws to stand good, is a sin and a shame. Two foolish children—and many of those that go to him are no better—stand before him for a half minute, and he pronounces them to be man and wife! And man and wife then they are, and must remain so till the grave takes one of them,—whatever their repentance may be when they wake up from their folly. It's just one of the blights upon bonny Scotland."

Margery, with no ceremony of leave-taking, turned at the last words, and continued her way. George Godolphin smiled at the blank expression displayed on the countenance of Charlotte Pain. Had Margery been talking Welsh, like the old woman with the pipe, she could not have less understood.

"You require the key, Charlotte," said he. "Shall I give it to you? Margery was my mother's maid, as you may have heard. Her sister, Selina, was maid to the present Lady Godolphin: not of late: long and long before she ever knew my father. It appears the girl, Selina, was a favorite of her mistress; but she left her in spite of opposition—opposition from all quarters—to marry Mr. Sandy Bray; and has, there's no doubt, been rueing it ever since. There are several children of an age now to be out in the world; but you heard Margery's account of them. I fear they do pull unconscionably at poor Margery's purse-strings."

"Why does she let them?" asked Charlotte.

Mr. George opened his penknife and ran the point of it through his cigar,

ere he answered. "Margery has a soft place in her heart. As I believe most of us have—if our friends could but find the way to it."

"How strange that two sisters should live, the one with your father's first wife, the other with his second!" exclaimed Charlotte, when she had given a few moments to thought. "Were they acquainted?—the ladies."

"Not in the least. They never saw each other. I believe it was through these women being sisters that my father became acquainted with the present Lady Godolphin. He was in Scotland, with Janet, visiting my mother's family, and Margery, who was with them, brought Janet to that very house, there, to see her sister. Mrs. Campbell—as she was then—happened to have gone there that day; and that's how the whole arose. People say there's a fatality in all things. One would think there must be: until that day, Mrs. Campbell had not been in the house for two or three years, and would not be likely to go into it for two or three more."

"Is Bray a mauvais sujet?"

George lifted his eyebrows. "I don't know that there's much against him, except his incorrigible laziness: that's bad enough when a man has children to keep. Work he will not. Beyond the odds and ends that he gets by the exercise of what he is pleased to call his trade, the fellow earns nothing. Lady Godolphin is charitable to the wife; and poor Margery, as she says, finds her purse drawn at both ends."

"I wondered why Margery came to Scotland!" exclaimed Charlotte, "not being Lady Godolphin's maid. What is Margery's capacity in your family? I have never been able to find out."

"It might puzzle herself to tell what it is now. After my mother's death, she waited on my sisters; but when they left Ashlydyat, Margery declined to follow them. She would not quit Sir George. She is excessively attached to him, nearly as much so as she was to my mother. That, the quitting of Ashlydyat, ourselves first,

and then my father, was a hard blow to Margery," George added in a dreamy tone. "She has never been the same in manner since."

"It was Margery, was it not, who attended upon Sir George in his long illness?"

"I do not know what he would have done without her," spoke George Godolphin in a tone that betrayed its own gratitude. "In sickness she is invaluable; certainly not to be replaced where she is attached. Lady Godolphin, though in her heart I do not fancy she likes Margery, respects her for her worth."

"I cannot say I like her," said Charlotte Pain. "Her manners are too independent. I have heard her order you about."

"And you will hear her again," said George Godolphin. "She exercised great authority over us when we were children, and she looks upon us as children still. Her years have grown with ours, and there is ever the same distance of age between us. I speak of the younger among us: to Thomas and Janet she is the respectful servant; in a measure also to Bessy; of me and Cecil she considers herself partial mistress."

"If they are so poor as to draw Margery of her money, how is it they can live in that house and pay its rent?" inquired Charlotte, looking towards the building.

"It is Bray's own. The land belonging to it has been mortgaged three deep long ago. He might have been in a tolerably good position had he chosen to take care of his chances: he was not born a peasant."

"Who is this?" exclaimed Charlotte.

A tall slouching man with red hair and heavy shoulders was advancing towards them from the house. George turned round to look; he had his back that way, leaning against a fence.

"That is Bray himself. Look at the lazy fellow! You may tell his temperament from his gait."

George Godolphin was right. The man was not walking along, but trailing, —sauntering; turning to either

side and bending his head as if flowers lay in his path and he wished to regard them; his hands in his pockets, his appearance any thing but fresh and clean. They watched him come up. He touched his hat then and accosted Mr. George Godolphin.

"My service to ye, sir? I didna know you were in these parts."

"So you are still in the land of the living, Bray!" was Mr. George's response. "How is business?"

"Dull as a dyke," returned Bray. "Times are bad. I've hardly took a crown in the last three months, sir. I shall have to emigrate, if this is to go on."

"I fear you would scarcely find another country so tolerant of your peculiar calling, Bray," mocked George. "And what would the neighborhood do without you? It must resign itself to single blessedness."

"The neighborhood dunna come to me. Folks go over to the kirk now it's come into fashion; and I'm going down. 'Twas different in the past times: a man would give a ten-pun note then to have things done neatly and quietly. But there's fresh notions and fresh havers; and, for all the good they have done me, I might as well be out of the world. Is this Miss Cecil?"

The last question was put abruptly, the man turning himself full upon Charlotte Pain, and scanning her face. George Godolphin was surprised out of an answer: had he taken a moment for reflection, he might have deemed the question an impertinent one, and passed it by.

"Miss Cecil is not in Scotland."

"I thought it might be her," said the man, "for Miss Cecil's looks are a country's talk, and I have heard much of them. I see now: there's naught of the Godolphin there. But it's a bonny face, young lady: and I dare say there's them that are finding it so."

He shambled on, with a gesture of the hand by the way of salutation. Charlotte Pain did not dislike the implied compliment. "How can this

man marry people?" she exclaimed. "He is no priest."

"He can, and he does; and is not interfered with, or forbidden," said George Godolphin. "At least, he did. By his own account, his patronage seems to be now on the decline."

"Did he marry them openly?"

"Well—no, I conclude not. If people found it convenient to marry openly they would not go to him. And why they should go to him at all, puzzles me, and always has done; for, the sort of marriage that he performs can be performed by anybody wearing a coat, in Scotland, or by the couple themselves. But he has acquired a name, 'Minister Bray;' and a great deal lies in a name for ladies ears."

"Ladies!" cried Charlotte, scornfully. "Only the peasants went to him, I am sure."

"Others have gone, besides peasants. Bray boasts yet of a fifty-pound note, once put into his hand for pronouncing the benediction. It is a ceremony that we are given to be lavish upon," added George, laughing. "I have heard of money being grudged for a funeral; but I never did for a wedding."

"Were I compelled to be a resident of this place, I should get married myself, or do something else as desperate, out of sheer ennui," she exclaimed.

"You find it dull?"

"It has been more tolerable since you came," she frankly avowed.

George raised his hat, and his blue eyes shot a glance into hers. "Thank you, Charlotte."

"Why were you so long in coming? Do you know what I had done. I had written a letter to desire Mrs. Verrall to recall me. Another week of it would have turned me melancholy. Your advent was better than nobody's."

"Thank you again, mademoiselle. When I promise——"

"Promise!" she warmly interrupted. "I have learnt what your promises are worth. Oh but, George, tell me—

What was it that you and Lady Godolphin were saying yesterday? It was about Ethel Grame. I only caught a word here and there."

"Thomas wishes Lady Godolphin would invite Ethel here for the remainder of their stay. He thinks Ethel would be all the better for a change, after being mured up in that fever-tainted house. But, don't talk of it. It was but a little private negotiation that Thomas was endeavoring to carry out upon his own account. He wrote to me and he wrote to my lady. Ethel knows nothing of it."

"And what does Lady Godolphin say?"

George drew in his lips. "She says No,—as I expected. And I believe she is for once sorry to say it, for pretty Ethel is a favorite of hers. But she retains her dread of the fever. Her argument is, that, although Ethel has escaped it in her own person, she might by possibility bring it here in her clothes."

"Stuff!" cried Charlotte Pain. "Sarah Anna might; but I do not see how Ethel could. I wonder Thomas does not marry, and have done with it! He is old enough."

"And Ethel young enough. It will not be delayed long now. The vexatious question, concerning residence, must be settled in some way."

"What residence? What is there vexatious about it?" quickly asked Charlotte, curiously.

"There is some vexation about it, in some way or other," returned George, with indifference, not choosing to speak more openly. "It is not my affair: it lies between Thomas and Sir George. When Thomas comes here next week——"

"Is Thomas coming next week?" she interrupted.

"That is the present plan. And I return."

She threw her flashing eyes at him. They said—well, they said a good deal: perhaps Mr. George could read it. "You had better get another letter of recall written, Charlotte," he resumed, in a tone which might be

taken for jest or for earnest, "and give me the honor of your escort."

"How you talk!" returned she, peevishly. "As if Lady Godolphin would allow me to go all that way under *your* escort! As if I would go!"

"You might have a less safe one, Charlotte mia," cried Mr. George, somewhat saucily. "No lion should come near you, to eat you up."

"George," resumed Charlotte, after a pause, "I wish you would tell me whether Mrs. Verrall—Good Heavens! what's that?"

Loud sounds of distress were sounding in their ears. They turned hastily. Maria Hastings, her camp-stool overturned, her sketching materials scattered on the ground, was flying towards them, sobbing, moaning, calling upon George Godolphin to save her. There was no mistaking that she was in a state of intense terror.

Charlotte Pain wondered if she had gone mad. She could see nothing possible to alarm her. George Godolphin cast his rapid glance to the spot where she had sat, and could see nothing, either. He hastened to meet her, and caught her in his arms, where she literally threw herself.

Entwined round her left wrist was a small snake, or reptile of the species, more than a foot long. It looked like an eel, writhing there. Maria had never come into personal contact with any thing of the sort: but she remembered what has been said of the deadly bite of a serpent; and her terror completely overmastered her.

He seized it and flung it from her; he laid her poor terrified face upon his breast, that she might sob out her fear; he cast a greedy glance at her wrist, where the thing had been: and his own face had turned white with emotion.

"My darling, there is no injury," he soothingly whispered. "Be calm! be calm!" And, utterly regardless of the presence of Charlotte Pain, he laid his cheek to hers, as if to reassure her, and kept it there.

Less regardless, possibly, had he seen Charlotte Pain's countenance.

It was dark as night. The scales were rudely torn from her eyes: and she saw, in that moment, how fallacious had been her own hopes touching George Godolphin.

CHAPTER IX.

MR. SANDY'S "TRADE."

"WHATEVER is the matter?"

The interruption came from Lady Godolphin. Charlotte Pain had perceived her approach, but had ungraciously refrained from intimating it to her companions. My lady, a coquettish white bonnet shading her delicate face, and her little person enveloped in a purple velvet mantle trimmed with ermine, was on her way to vouchsafe a visit to her ex-maid, Selina. She surveyed the group with intense astonishment. Maria Hastings, white, sobbing, clinging to George Godolphin in unmistakable terror; Mr. George soothing her in rather a marked manner; and Charlotte Pain, erect, haughty, her arms folded, her head drawn up, giving no assistance, her countenance about as pleasant as a demon's my lady had once the pleasure of seeing at the play. She called out the above words before she was well up with them.

George Godolphin did not release Maria; he simply lifted his head. "She has been greatly terrified, Lady Godolphin: but no harm is done. Some reptile of the snake species fastened on her wrist. I have flung it off."

He glanced towards the spot where stood Lady Godolphin, as much as to imply that he had flung the offender *there*. My lady shrieked out, caught up her petticoats, we won't say how high, and leaped away nimbly.

"I never heard of such a thing!" she exclaimed. "A snake! What should bring snakes about, here?"

"Say a serpent!" broke from the pale lips of Charlotte Pain.

Lady Godolphin did not detect the irony, and she felt really alarmed. Maria, growing calmer, and perhaps feeling half ashamed of the emotion, which fear had caused her to display, drew away from George Godolphin to stand alone. He would not suffer that, and made her take his arm. "I am sorry to have alarmed you all so much," she said. "Indeed, I could not help it, Lady Godolphin."

"A serpent in the grass!" repeated her ladyship, unable to get over the surprise. "How did it get on to you, Maria? Were you lying down?"

"I was sitting on the camp-stool; there; busy with my drawing," she answered. "My left hand was hanging down, touching, I believe, the grass. I began to feel something cold on my wrist, but at first did not notice it. Then I lifted it and saw that dreadful thing wound round it. I could not shake it off. Oh, Lady Godolphin! I felt—I hardly know how I felt. Almost as if I should have died, had there been no one near to run to."

Lady Godolphin, her skirts still lifted, the tips of her toes touching gingerly the path, to which they had now hastened, and her eyes alert, lest the serpent should come trailing forth from any unexpected direction, remarked that it was a mercy Maria had escaped with only fright. "You seem to experience enough of that," she said. "Don't faint, child."

Maria's lips parted with a sickly smile, which she meant should be a brave one. She was both timid and excitable; and, if terror did attack her, she felt it in no common degree. What would have been but a passing fear to another, forgotten almost as soon as felt, was to her agony. Remarkably susceptible was she to the extreme of pleasure and the extreme of pain. "There is no fear of my fainting," she answered to Lady Godolphin. "I have never fainted in my life."

"I am on my road to see an old servant who lives in that house," said Lady Godolphin, pointing to the tene-

ment, little thinking how far it had formed their theme of discourse. "You shall come with me, and rest yourself, and take some water."

"Yes, that is the best thing to be done," said George Godolphin. "I'll take you there, Maria, and then I'll have a hunt after the beast. I ought to have killed him at the time."

Lady Godolphin walked on, Charlotte Pain at her side. Charlotte's lip was curling. "Did it alarm you much Charlotte?" asked she.

"No," replied Charlotte. "I am not alarmed at eels."

"At eels!" repeated Lady Godolphin. "Eels!"

"It was nothing but an eel," said Charlotte, "escaped out of some neighboring pond."

My lady turned to those behind. "Maria, what a pity to have alarmed yourself for nothing! Charlotte Pain says it was an eel."

"It was not an eel," answered George.

"It was nothing more formidable," persisted Charlotte, her tone assuming much pleasantry, as if she would joke the affair away. "But, eels are quite sufficient to call forth pretty affectations when there's any one by worth acting them for."

The concluding words were spoken to Lady Godolphin only. Mr. George, however, caught them, and felt a little "savage." "There's no occasion for your being put out over it, Miss Pain," he called after her. "It has not hurt you."

"But was it an eel, George?" inquired my lady.

"It was not an eel, Lady Godolphin. It was a snake: though possibly a harmless one."

"Some of those snakes spit venom, and men die from it," cried her ladyship, growing flustered again. And she folded her petticoats tight around her, and walked on, out of harm's way.

George Godolphin bent his head to look at Maria. The color was coming into her face again. "It is a long while since you had such a fright as this, Maria."

"I do not remember ever to have had one like it," she replied. "But I must get my things; they are all lying there."

He said that he would get them for her.

The house door, to which they were bound, stood open. Across its lower portion, as if to prevent the egress of children, was a board, formerly placed there for that express purpose. The children were grown now, and scattered, but the board remained; the inmates stepping over it at their will. Sandy Bray, who must have skulked back to his home by some unseen circuit, made a rush to the board at the sight of Lady Godolphin, and pulled it out of its grooves, leaving the entrance clear. But for his intense idleness, knowing she was coming, he would have removed it earlier.

It was a large room they entered upon, half sitting-room, half kitchen, its boarded floor very clean. The old woman, a cleanly, well-mannered, honest-faced old woman, was busy knitting then, and came forward, curtesying: no vestige of her pipe to be seen or smelt. "Selina was in bed," Bray said, standing humbly before Lady Godolphin. "Selina had heard bad news of one of the brats, and had worried herself sick over it, as my lady knew it was the stupid nature of Selina to do. Would my lady be pleased to step up to see her?"

Yes; my lady would be pleased to do so by-and-by. But at present she directed a glass of water to be brought to Miss Hastings, who had been placed in the only chair the room afforded. Maria resisted; said she was well now, and would sit upon a bench: Lady Godolphin must take the chair. No. Lady Godolphin chose to sit upon the hard bench by the side of the attractive-faced and smiling old lady: attractive to the eye of a physiognomist: and tried to talk with her. Little good came of it: my lady was unable to understand herself; and could not tell whether she

was understood. Bray brought the water in a yellow cup.

"Eh, but there is some of them things about here," he said when the cause of alarm was mentioned. "I think there must be a nest of 'em. They be harmless, so far as I know."

"Why don't you find the nest?" asked Mr. George Godolphin.

"And what good, if I did find 'em, sir?" said he.

"Kill the lot," responded George.

He strode out of the house, Bray following in his wake, to look for the reptile which had caused the alarm. Bray was sure nothing would come of it: the thing had time to get clear away.

In point of fact, nothing did come of it. George Godolphin could not fix upon the precise spot where they had stood when he threw away the reptile; and, to beat over the whole field, which was extensive, would have been endless work. He examined carefully the spot where she had sat, both he and Bray, but could see no trace of any thing alarming. Gathering up her treasures, including the camp-stool, he set off with them. Bray made a feeble show of bearing the stool. "No," said George, "I'll carry it myself; it would be too much trouble for you."

Charlotte Pain stood at the door, watching as they approached, her rich cheek glowing, her eye flashing. Never had she looked more beautiful, and she bent her sweetest smile upon Mr. George, who had the camp-stool swinging on his back. Lady Godolphin had gone up then to the invalid. Maria, quite herself again, came forward.

"No luck," said George. "I meant to have secured the fellow and put him in a glass case as a memento: but he has been too cunning. Here's your sketch, Maria; undamaged. And here are the other rattle-traps."

She bent over the drawing quite fondly. "I am glad it was finished," she said. "I can do the filling-in

later. I should not have had courage to sit in that place again."

"Well, old lady," cried George in his free-and-easy manner, as he stood by the Welshwoman, and looked down at her nimble fingers, "so you have come all the way from Wales on foot, I hear! You put some of us to the shame."

She looked up and smiled pleasantly. She understood English better than she could speak it.

"Not on foot all the way," she managed to explain. "On foot to the great steamer, and then on foot again after the steamer landed her in Scotland. Not less than a hundred miles of land, take it both together."

"Oh, I see!" said George, perceiving that Margery had taken up a wrong impression. "But you must have been a good while doing that?"

"But she had the time before her," she answered, more by signs than speech, "and her legs were used to the roads. In the lifetime of her husband she had oftentimes accompanied him on foot to different parts of England, when he went there with his droves of cattle. It was in those journeys that she learnt to talk English."

George laughed at that, the talking of English. "Did you learn the use of the pipe also in the journeys, old lady?"

She certainly had; for she nodded fifty times in answer, and looked delighted at his divination. "But she was obliged to put up with cheap tobacco now," she said: "and had a trouble to get that!"

George pulled out a great paper of Turkey, from some hidden receptacle of his coat, "Did she like that sort?"

She looked at it with the eye of a connoisseur, touched it, smelt it, and finally tasted it. "Ah, yes! that was good; very good; too good for her."

"Not a bit of it," said George. "It's yours, old lady. There! It will keep your pipe going on the road home."

When fully convinced that he meant it in earnest, she laid hold of his hand, shook it heartily and long, and went

off into a Welsh oration. It was cut short in the midst. She caught sight of Bray, coming in at the house door, and smuggled the present out of sight amidst her petticoats. Had Mr. Sandy seen it, she might have derived little of its benefit herself.

"The storm's brewing fast," observed Sandy. "It won't be long before it falls."

George Godolphin went to the door and stood there, regarding the weather. The clouds had gathered, and there was every appearance of a coming storm. "By Jove, yes!" he exclaimed, "we shall have it smartly. I suppose it will not do to warn my lady; she resents even a word of interference: but no carriage can get here."

Lady Godolphin would be equally displeased at their starting for home without her; they knew that she would regard any such step as a slight. They could only wait. And nothing loth, either: the prospect of a storm is not much heeded by the young.

Time lagged. The conversation fell upon Bray's trade,—as the man was wont to call it; though who or what led to the topic none of them could remember. He recounted two or three incidents of interest; one of a gentleman's marrying a young wife and being shot dead the next day by her friends. She was an heiress, and they had run away from Ireland. But that occurred years and years ago, he added. Would the ladies like to see the room?

He opened a door at the back of the kitchen, traversed a passage, and entered a small place, which could only be called a room by courtesy. They followed, wondering. The walls were whitewashed, the floor was of brick, and the contracted skylight, by which it was lighted, was of thick coarse glass, embellished with green knobs. What with the lowering sky, and with this lowering window, the room wore an appearance of the gloomiest twilight. No furniture was in it, except a table (or something that served for one) covered with a large

green baize cloth, on which lay a book. The contrast from the kitchen, bright with its fire, with the appliances of household life, to this strange comfortless place, made them shiver. "A fit place for the noose to be tied in!" cried irreverent George, surveying it critically.

Bray took the words literally. "Yes," said he. "It's kept for that purpose alone. It is a bit out of the common, and that pleases the women. If I said the words in my kitchen, it might not be so satisfying to them, ye see. It does not take two minutes to do," he added, taking his stand behind the table and opening the book. "I wish I had as many pieces of gold as I have done it here in my time."

Charlotte Pain took up the words defiantly. "It is impossible that such a marriage can stand. It is not a marriage."

"'Deed, but it is, young lady."

"It cannot be good," she haughtily rejoined. If it stands good for this loose-lawed country, it cannot for others."

"Ay, how about that?" interrupted George, still in his light tone of ridicule. "Would it hold good in England?"

Minister Bray craned his long neck towards them, over the table, where they stood in a group. He took hold of the hand of George Godolphin, of the hand of Charlotte Pain, and put them together. "Ye have but to say 'I take you, young lady, to be my lawful wife; and I take you, sir, to be my husband,' putting in your right names. I'd then pronounce ye man and wife, and say the blessing on it; and the deed would be done, and hold good all over the world."

Did Mr. Sandy Bray anticipate that he might thus extemporize an impromptu job, which should bring some grist to his empty mill? Not improbably; for he did not release their hands, but kept them joined together, looking at both in silence.

George Godolphin was the first to draw his hand away. Charlotte had only stared with wondering eyes, and

she now burst into a laugh of ridicule. "Thank you for your information," said Mr. George. "There's no knowing, Bray, but I may call your services into requisition some time."

"Where are you?" came the soft voice of Lady Godolphin down the passage. "We must make all haste home; it is going to rain. Charlotte, are you there? Where have you all got to? Charlotte, I say!"

Charlotte hastened out. Lady Godolphin took her arm at once, and walked with a quick step through the kitchen into the open air, nodding adieu to the old Welshwoman. My lady, herself, her ermine, her velvets, possibly her delicate-bloomed complexion, all shrank from the violence of a storm: storms, neither of life nor of weather, had ever come too near Lady Godolphin. She glanced upward at the threatening and angry sky, and pulled Charlotte on.

"Can you walk fast? So lovely a morning as it was!"

Charlotte answered by walking fast. But she looked back as she walked. "They are not coming yet!" she exclaimed. "Maria Hastings will get wet. I will return and tell them."

"Nonsense!" panted my lady, her breath getting short with the unusual exertion, "they can see the darkness as well as we can. They are sure to come." And she kept fast hold of Charlotte's arm.

"Here comes one of the servants!" exclaimed Charlotte. "With umbrellas, no doubt. How he runs!"

My lady lifted her eyes. Advancing towards them with fleet foot, as if he were running for a wager, came a man in the Godolphin livery. If umbrellas had been the object of his coming, he must have dropped them on his way; for his arms swang beside him, and his hands were empty.

"My lady," cried the man, nearly as much out of breath as Lady Godolphin, "Sir George is taken ill!"

My lady stopped then. "Ill!" she repeated. "In what way, ill?"

"Margery has just found him lying on the floor of his room, my lady.

We have got him on to the bed, but he appears to be quite insensible. Andrew has gone for the doctor."

"Hasten to the house there, and acquaint Mr. George Godolphin," said my lady, pointing to Bray's.

But Charlotte was already gone on the errand. She quitted Lady Godolphin's arm and started back with all speed, calling out that she would inform Mr. George Godolphin. My lady, on her part, had sped on in the direction of Broomhead, with a fleeter foot than before.

Leaving the man standing where he was: "Which of the two be I to follow, I wonder?" he soliloquized. "I suppose I had better keep up with my lady."

When Charlotte Pain had quitted Mr. Sandy Bray's match-making room, at my lady's call, George Godolphin turned with a rapid, impulsive motion to Maria Hastings, who was following Charlotte, caught her hand, and drew her beside him, as he stood before Bray. "Maria, she will fetter me to her in spite of myself!" he said in a hoarse whisper. "Let me put it out of her power."

Maria looked at him inquiringly. Well she might.

"Be mine now: here," he rapidly continued, bending his face so that she alone might hear. "I swear that I never will presume upon the act, until it can be more legally solemnized. But it will serve to bind us to each other beyond the power of man or woman to set aside."

Maria turned red, pale,—any color that you will,—and quietly drew her hand from that of Mr. George Godolphin's. "I do not quite know whether you are in earnest or in jest, George. You will allow me to infer the latter."

Quiet as were the words, calm as was the manner, there was that about her which unmistakably showed Mr. George Godolphin that he might not venture farther to forget himself,—if, indeed, he had not been in jest. Maria, a true gentlewoman at heart, professed to assume that he had been.

"I beg your pardon," he murmured. "Nay: let me make my peace, Maria." And he took her hand again, and held it in his. Minister Bray leaned towards them with an earnest face. Resigning the hope of doing any little stroke of business on his own account, he sought to obtain some information on a different subject.

"Sir, would ye be pleased to tell me a trifle about your criminal laws over the border? One of my ne'er-do-wells has been getting into trouble there, and they may make him smart for it."

George Godolphin knew that he alluded to the ill-starred Nick. "What are the circumstances?" he asked. "I will tell you what I can."

Sandy entered upon the story. They stood before him, absorbed in it,—for Maria, she also listened with interest,—when an exclamation caused them to turn. Maria drew her hand from George Godolphin's with a quick gesture. There stood Charlotte Pain.

Stood there with a white face, and a flashing, haughty eye. "We are coming instantly," said George. "We shall catch you up;" for he thought she had reappeared to remind them.

"It is well," she answered. "And it may be as well to haste, Mr. George Godolphin, if you would see your father alive."

"What!" he answered. But Charlotte had turned again, and was gone like the wind. With all his speed, he could not catch her up until they had left the house some distance behind.

CHAPTER X.

THE SHADOW.

IN the heart of the town of Prior's Ash was situated the banking-house of Godolphin, Crosse, and Godolphin. Built at the corner of a street, it faced two ways: the bank and its doors being in High Street, the principal street

of the town; the entrance to the dwelling-house being in Crosse Street, a new, short street, not much frequented, which had been called after Mr. Crosse, who at the time it was made lived at the bank. There were but six or eight houses in Crosse Street,—detached, private dwellings,—and the street led to the open country, and to a pathway—not a carriage-way—that would, if you liked to follow it, take you to Ashlydyat.

The house attached to the bank was a commodious one,—its rooms were mostly large and handsome, though not many in number. A pillared entrance, to which you ascended by steps, took you into a small hall. On the right of this hall, as you entered, was the room used as a dining-room,—a light and spacious apartment, its large window opening on a covered terrace where plants were kept, and that again standing open to a sloping lawn surrounded with shrubs and flowers. This room was hung with fine old pictures brought from Ashlydyat. Lady Godolphin did not care for pictures: she preferred delicately-papered walls: and but few of the Ashlydyat paintings had been removed to the Folly. On the left of the hall were the rooms pertaining to the bank. At the back of the hall, beyond the dining-room, a handsome well-staircase led to the apartments above, one of which was a fine drawing-room. From the upper windows at the back of the house a view of Lady Godolphin's Folly might be obtained, rising high and picturesque; also of the turret of Ashlydyat, grey and grim,—not of Ashlydyat itself: its surrounding trees buried it.

This dining-room—elegant and airy, and fitted up with exquisite taste—was the favorite sitting-room of the Miss Godolphins. The drawing-room above—larger and grander, less comfortable, and looking on to the high street—was less used by them. In this lower room there sat one evening Thomas Godolphin and his eldest sister. It was about a month subsequent to that day, at the commencement of this his-

tory, when you saw the hounds throw off, and a week or ten days since Sir George Godolphin had been found insensible on the floor of his room at Broomhead. The attack had proved to be nothing but a prolonged fainting-fit; but even that told upon Sir George in his shattered state of health. It had caused plans to be somewhat changed. Thomas Godolphin's visit to Scotland had been postponed; for Sir George was not strong enough for business consultations,—which would have been the chief object of his journey,—and George Godolphin had not yet returned to Prior's Ash.

Thomas and Miss Godolphin had been dining alone. Bessy was spending the evening at All Souls' Rectory: she and Mr. Hastings were active workers together in parish matters: and Cecil was dining at Ashlydyat. Mrs. Verrall had called in the afternoon and carried her off. The dessert was on the table, but Thomas had turned from it, and was sitting over the fire. Miss Godolphin sat opposite to him, nearer the table, her fingers busy with her knitting, on which fell the rays of the chandelier. They were discussing plans earnestly and gravely.

"No, Thomas, it would not do," she was saying. "We must go. One of the partners always has resided here at the bank, and it is necessary, in my opinion, that one should. Let business men be at their business."

"But look at the trouble, Janet," remonstrated Thomas Godolphin. "Look at the expense. You may be no sooner out than you may have to come back again."

Janet turned her strangely-deep eyes on her brother. "Do not make too sure of that, Thomas."

"How do you mean, Janet? In my father's precarious state, we cannot, unhappily, count upon his life."

"Thomas, I am sure,—I seem to see,—that he will not be with us long. No: and I am contemplating the time when he shall have left us. It would change many things. Your home would then be Ashlydyat."

Thomas Godolphin smiled. As if any power would keep *him* from inhabiting Ashlydyat when he should be its master. "Yes," he answered. "And George would come here."

"There it is!" said Janet. "Would George live here? I do not feel sure that he would."

"Of course he would, Janet. He would live here with you, as I do now. That is a perfectly understood thing."

"Does he so understand it?"

"He understands it, and approves of it."

Janet shook her head. "George likes his liberty; he will not be content to settle down to the ways of a sober household."

"Nay, Janet, you must remember one thing. When George shall come to this house, he comes, so to say, as its master. He will not, of course, interfere with your arrangements; he will fall in with them readily; but neither will he, nor must he, be under your control. To attempt any thing of the sort again would not do."

Janet knitted on in silence. She had essayed to keep Master George under her hand when they first came to the bank to reside: and the result was that he had chosen a separate home, where he could be entirely *en garçon*.

"Eh me!" sighed Janet. "If young men could but see the folly of their ways,—as they see them in after-life!"

"Therefore, Janet, I say that it would be exceedingly unadvisable for you to leave the house," continued Thomas Godolphin, leaving her remark unnoticed. "It might be, that, before you were well out of it, you must return to it."

"I see the inconvenience also; the uncertainty," she answered. "But there is no help for it."

"Yes there is. Janet, I wish you would let me settle it."

"How would you settle it?"

"By bringing Ethel here,—on a visit to you."

Janet laid down her knitting. "What do you mean? That there should be

two mistresses in the house, she and I? No, no, Thomas; the daftest old wife in all the parish would tell you that does not do."

"Not two mistresses. You would be sole mistress, as you are now: I and Ethel your guests. Janet, indeed it would be the best plan. By the spring we should see how Sir George went on. If he improved, then the question could be definitively settled: and either you or I would fix upon our residence elsewhere. If he does not improve, I fear, Janet, that the spring will have seen the end."

Something in the words appeared to excite particularly the attention of Janet. She gazed at Thomas as if she would search him through and through. "By the spring!" she repeated. "When, then, do you contemplate marrying Ethel?"

"I should like her to be mine by Christmas," was the low answer.

"Thomas! And December close upon us!"

"If not, some time in January," he continued, paying no heed to her surprise. "It is so decided."

Miss Godolphin drew a long breath. "With whom is it decided?"

"With Ethel."

"You'd marry a wife, without a home to bring her to? Had thoughtless George told me that he was going to do such a thing I could have believed him. Not of you, Thomas?"

"Janet, the home shall no longer be a barrier. I wish you would receive Ethel here as your guest."

"It is not likely that she would come. The first thing a married woman looks out for is to have a home of her own."

Thomas laughed. "Not come, Janet? Have you yet to learn how unassuming and meek is the character of Ethel? We have spoken of this plan together, and Ethel's only fear is, lest she should 'be in the way of Miss Godolphin.' Failing the carrying out of this project, Janet,—for I see you are, as I thought you would be, prejudiced against it,—I shall engage a lodging as near to the bank

as may be, and there I shall take Ethel."

"Would it be seemly that the heir of Ashlydyat should go into lodgings on his marriage?" asked Janet, grief and sternness in her tone.

"Things are seemly or unseemly, Janet, according to circumstances. It would be more seemly for the heir of Ashlydyat to take temporary lodgings while he waited for Ashlydyat, than for him to turn his sisters from their home for a month, or a few months, as the case might be. The pleasantest plan would be for me to bring Ethel here,—entirely as your guest. It is what she and I should both like. If you object, I shall take her elsewhere. Bessy and Cecil would be delighted with the arrangement: they are fond of Ethel."

"And when the children begin to come, Thomas?" cried Miss Godolphin, in her old-fashioned, steady, Scotch manner. She had a great deal of her mother about her.

Thomas's lips parted with a quaint smile. "Can the children come with that speed, Janet? Things will be decided, one way or the other, months before children shall have had time to arrive."

Janet knitted a whole row before she spoke. "I will take a few hours to reflect upon it, Thomas," she said then.

"Do so," he replied, rising and glancing at the time-piece. "Half-past seven! What time will Cecil expect me? I wish to spend half an hour with Ethel. Shall I go for Cecil before, or afterwards?"

"Go for Cecil at once, Thomas. It will be better for her to be home early."

Thomas Godolphin went to the hall-door and looked out upon the night. He was considering whether he need put on an overcoat. It was a bright moonlight night, warm and genial. So he shut the door, and started. "I wish the cold would come!" he exclaimed, half aloud. He was thinking of the fever, which still clung obstinately to Prior's Ash, showing

itself fitfully and partially in fresh places about every third or fourth day.

He took the foot-road down Crosse Street,—a lonely road, and at night especially unfrequented. In one part of it, as he ascended near Ashlydyat, the pathway was so narrow that two people could scarcely walk abreast without touching the trunks of the ash-trees growing on either side and meeting overhead. A murder had been committed on this spot a few years before,—a sad tale of barbarity, offered to a girl by one who professed to be her lover. She lay buried in All-Souls' churchyard, and he within the walls of the county prison where he had been executed. Of course the rumor went that her ghost "walked" there,—the natural sequence to these dark tales; and what with that, and what with the damp loneliness of the place, few could be met in it after dark.

Thomas Godolphin went steadily on,—his thoughts running upon the subject of his conversation with Janet. It is probable that but for the difficulty touching a residence, Ethel would have been his the past autumn. When any thing should happen to Sir George, Thomas would be in residential possession of Ashlydyat three months afterwards,—such had been the agreement with Mr. Verrall when he took Ashlydyat. Not in his father's lifetime would Thomas Godolphin (clinging to the fancies and traditions which had descended with the old place) consent to take up his abode as Ashlydyat's master; but no longer than was absolutely necessary would he remain out of it as soon as it was his own. George would then remove to the bank, which would still be his sister's home, as it was now. In the event of George's marrying, the Miss Godolphins would finally leave it; but George Godolphin did not, so far as people saw, give indications that he was likely to marry. In the precarious state of Sir George's health—and it was pretty sure he would soon either get better or worse—these changes might take place any day: therefore

it was not desirable that the Miss Godolphins should quit the bank, and that the trouble and expense of setting up and furnishing a home for them should be incurred. Of course they could not go into lodgings. Altogether, if Janet could only be brought to see it, Thomas's plan was the best,—that his young bride should be Janet's guest for a short while.

It was through the upper part of this dark path, which was called the Ash-tree walk, that George Godolphin had taken Maria Hastings, the night they had left Lady Godolphin's dinner-table to visit the Dark Plain. Thomas in due course arrived at the walk's end, and passed through the turnstile. Lady Godolphin's Folly lay on the right,—high and white and clear in the moonbeams. Ashlydyat lay to the left,—dark and grey, and nearly hidden by the trees. Grey as it was, Thomas looked at it fondly: his heart yearned to it: and it was to be the future home of him and of Ethel!

"Halloa! who's this? Oh, I beg your pardon, Mr. Godolphin!"

The speaker was Snow, the surgeon. He had come swiftly upon Thomas Godolphin,—turning the corner round the ash-trees from the Dark Plain. That he had been to Ashlydyat was certain,—for the road led nowhere else. Thomas did not know that illness was in the house.

"Neither did I," said Mr. Snow in answer to the remark, "until an hour ago, when I was sent for in haste."

A thought crossed Thomas Godolphin. "Not a case of fever, I hope?"

"No. I think that's leaving us. There has been an accident at Ashlydyat to Mrs. Verrall,—at least, what might have been an accident, I should rather say," added the surgeon correcting himself. "The injury is so slight as not to be worth the name of one."

"What has happened?" asked Thomas Godolphin.

"She managed to set her sleeve on fire: a white lace, or muslin, falling below the silk sleeve of her gown. In standing near a candle the flame

caught it. But now look at that young woman's presence of mind! Instead of wasting the moments in screams, or running through the house from top to bottom and bottom to top, as most would have done, she instantly threw herself down on the rug, and rolled herself in it. That's the sort of woman to go through life."

"Is she much burnt?"

"Pooh! Many a child gets worse burnt a dozen times in its first dozen years. The arm between the elbow and the wrist is a trifle scorched. It's nothing. They need not have sent for me: a drop of cold water applied will take out all the fire. Your sister Cecilia was ten times more alarmed than Mrs. Verrall."

"I am truly glad it is no worse!" said Thomas Godolphin. "I feared the fever might have got up there."

"That is taking its departure, as I think. And the sooner it's gone, the better. It has been capricious as a coquette's smiles. How strange it is that not a soul down by those pollard pig-stys should have had it, except the Bonds!"

"It is equally strange that in many houses it should have attacked only one inmate, and spared the rest. What do you think now of Sarah Anne Grame?"

Mr. Snow shook his head, and his voice grew insensibly low. "In my opinion she is sinking fast. I found her worse this afternoon,—weaker than she has been at all. Lady Sarah said, 'If she could get her to Ventnor!—if she could get her to Hastings!' But the removal would kill her: she'd die on the road. It will be a terrible blow to Lady Sarah, if it does come; and—though it may seem harsh to say it—a retort upon her selfishness. Did you know that they used to make Ethel head-nurse while the fever was upon her?"

"No!" exclaimed Thomas Godolphin.

"They did, then. My lady inadvertently let it out to-day. Dear child! If she had caught it, I should never have forgiven her mother, whatever

you may have done. Good-night. I have half a score of visits now to pay, before bedtime."

"Worse!" soliloquized Thomas Godolphin, as he stepped on. "Poor, peevish Sarah Anne! But,—I wonder," he hesitated as the thought struck him, "whether, if the worst should come, as Snow seems to anticipate, it would delay Ethel's marriage? What with one delay and another——"

Thomas Godolphin's voice ceased, and his heart stood still. He had turned the corner, to the front of the grove of ash-trees, and, stretching out before him, was the Dark Plain, with its weird-like bushes, so like graves, and,—*us Shadow*, lying cold and still in the white moonlight. Yes! there surely lay the Shadow of Ashlydyat. The grey archway rose behind it; the flat plain extended out before it, and the Shadow was between them, all too distinct. The first shock over, Thomas Godolphin's pulses coursed on again. He had seen that Shadow before in his lifetime, but he halted to gaze at it again. It was very palpable. The bier—as it looked like—in the middle, the mourner at the head, the mourner at the foot, each—as a spectator could fancy—with bowed heads. In spite of the superstition touching this strange shadow, in which Thomas Godolphin had been brought up, he looked round now for some natural explanation of it. He was a man of intellect, a man of the world, a man who played his full share in the practical business of every-day life: and such men are not given to acknowledge superstitious fancies in this age of enlightenment, no matter what bent may have been given to their minds in childhood. Therefore Thomas Godolphin ranged his eyes round and round in the air, and could see nothing that would solve the mystery. "I wonder whether it be possible that certain states of the atmosphere should give out these shadows?" he soliloquized. "But,—if so,—why should it invariably appear in that one precise spot, and in

no other? Could Snow have seen that, I wonder?"

He walked on towards Ashlydyat, his head turned sideways always, looking at the Shadow. "I am glad Janet does not see it! It would frighten her into a belief that my father's end was near," came his next thought.

Mrs. Verrall, playing the invalid, lay on a sofa, her auburn hair somewhat dishevelled, her pretty pink cheeks flushed, her satin slippers peeping out,—altogether challenging admiration. The damaged arm, its silk sleeve pinned up, was stretched out on a cushion,—a small, delicate cambric handkerchief, saturated with water, resting lightly on the burns. A basin of water stood near, with a similar handkerchief lying in it, and Mrs. Verrall's maid was near that, ready to change the handkerchiefs as might be required. Thomas Godolphin drew a chair near to Mrs. Verrall, and listened to the account of the accident, giving her his full sympathy, for it might have been a bad one.

"You must possess great presence of mind," he observed. "I think your showing it, as you have done in this instance, has won Mr. Snow's heart."

Mrs. Verrall laughed. "I believe I do possess presence of mind. And so does Charlotte. Once we were out with some friends in a barouche, and the horses took fright, ran up a bank, turned the carriage over, and nearly kicked it to pieces. While all with us were frightened in a fearful manner, Charlotte and I remained calm and cool."

"It is a good thing for you," he observed.

"I suppose it is. Better, at any rate, than to go mad with fear, as some do. Cecil,"—turning to her,— "has had enough fright to last her for a twelvemonth, she says."

"Were you present, Cecil?" asked her brother.

"I was present, but I did not see it," replied Cecil. "It occurred in Mrs. Verrall's bedroom, and I was

standing at the dressing-table, with my back to her. The first I knew, or saw, was Mrs. Verrall on the floor, with the rug rolled round her."

The tea was brought in, and Mrs. Verrall insisted that they should remain for it. Thomas pleaded an engagement, but she would not listen: they could not have the heart, she said, to leave her all alone. So Thomas—the very essence of good feeling and politeness—waived his objection and remained. Not the bowing politeness of a *petit-maitre*, but the genuine considerations that spring from a noble and unselfish heart.

"I am in ecstasy that Verrall was away," she exclaimed. "He would have magnified it into something formidable, and I should not have been let stir for a month."

"When do you expect him home?" asked Thomas Godolphin.

"I never do expect him until he comes," replied Mrs. Verrall. "London seems to possess attractions for him. Once up there, he may stay a day, or he may stay fifty. I never know."

Cecil went up-stairs to put her things on when tea was over, the maid attending her. Mrs. Verrall turned her head to see that the door was closed, and then spoke abruptly:

"Mr. Godolphin, can any thing be done to prevent the wind whistling as it does in these passages?"

"Does it whistle?" he replied.

"The last few nights it has whistled—oh, I cannot describe it to you! If I were not a good sleeper, it would have kept me awake. I wish it could be prevented."

"It cannot be done, I believe, without pulling the house down," he said. "My mother had a great dislike to hear it, and a good deal of expense was gone to in trying to remedy it; but it did little or no good."

"What puzzles me is, that the wind should so have been whistling inside the house, when there's no wind to whistle outside. The weather has

been quite calm. Sometimes, when it is actually blowing great guns, we cannot hear it at all."

"Something peculiar in the construction of the passages," he carelessly remarked. "You hear the whistling sound, or not, according to the quarter in which the wind may happen to be."

"The servants tell a tale,—these old Ashlydyat retainers who remain in the house,—that this strangely-sounding wind is connected with the Ashlydyat superstition, and foretells ill to the Godolphins."

Thomas Godolphin smiled. "I am sure you do not give ear to any thing so foolish, Mrs. Verrall."

"No, that I do not," she answered. "It would take a great deal to imbue me with faith in the supernatural. Ghosts! Shadows! As if anybody with common sense could believe in such impossibilities! They tell another tale about here, do they not? That a shadow of some sort may occasionally be seen in the moonbeams, in front of the archway, on the Dark Plain,—a shadow cast by no earthly substance. Charlotte once declared she saw it. How I laughed at her!"

His lips parted as he listened, and he lightly echoed the laugh spoken of as Charlotte's. Considering what his eyes had just seen, the laugh must have been a very conscious one.

"When do you expect your brother home?" asked Mrs. Verrall. "He seems to be making a stay at Broomhead."

"George is not at Broomhead," replied Thomas Godolphin. "He left three or four days ago. He has joined a party of friends in the Highlands. I do not suppose he will return here much before Christmas."

Cecil appeared. They wished Mrs. Verrall good-night, and a speedy cure from her burns, and departed. Thomas took the open road-way this time, which did not lead them near the ash-trees or the Dark Plain.

CHAPTER XI.

A TELEGRAPHIC DISPATCH.

"CECIL," asked Thomas Godolphin, as they walked along, "how came you to go alone to the Verralls', in this impromptu fashion?"

"There was no harm in it," answered Cecil, who possessed a spice of self-will. "Mrs. Verrall said she was lonely, and it would be a charity if I or Bessy would go home with her. Bessy could not: she was engaged to the rectory. Where was the harm?"

"My dear, had there been 'harm,' I am sure you would not have wished to go. There was none. Only I do not care that you should become upon very intimate terms with the Verralls. A little visiting on either side cannot be avoided; but let it end there."

"Thomas, you are just like Janet!" impulsively spoke Cecil. "She does not like the Verralls."

"Neither do I. I do not like him. I do not like Charlotte Pain——"

"Janet again!" struck in Cecil. "She and you must be constituted precisely alike; for you are sure to have the same likes and dislikes. She would not willingly let me go to-day; only she could not refuse without downright rudeness."

"I like Mrs. Verrall the best of them, I was going to say," he continued. "Do not get too intimate with them, Cecil."

"But you know nothing against Mr. Verrall?"

"Nothing whatever: except that I cannot make him out."

"How do you mean—'make him out'?"

"Well, Cecil, it may be difficult to define my meaning so that you will understand it. Verrall is so impassive; so utterly silent with regard to himself. Who is he? Where did he come from? Did he drop from the moon? Where has he previously lived? What are his family? Where does his property lie?—in the funds, or in land, or in securities, or what? Most men, even though they do come

strangers into a neighborhood, supply indications of some of these things, either accidentally or purposely."

"They have lived in London," said Cecil.

"London is a wide place," answered Thomas Godolphin.

"And I'm sure they have plenty of money."

"There's where the chief puzzle is. When people possess so much money as Verrall appears to do, they generally make no secret of whence it is derived. Understand, my dear, I cast no suspicion to him in any way; I only say that we know nothing of him; or of the ladies either——"

"They are very charming ladies," interrupted Cecil again: "especially Mrs. Verrall."

"Beyond the fact that they are very charming ladies," acquiesced Thomas, in a tone that made Cecil think he was laughing at her: "you should let me finish, my dear. But I would prefer that they were rather more open as to themselves, before they became the too intimate friends of Miss Cecilia Godolphin."

Cecil dropped the subject. She did not always agree with what she called Thomas's prejudices. "How quaint that old doctor of ours is!" she exclaimed. "When he had looked at Mrs. Verrall's arm, he made a great parade of getting out his spectacles, and putting them on, and looking again. 'What d'ye call it—a burn?' he asked her. 'It is a burn, is it not?' she answered, looking at him. 'No,' said he, 'it's nothing but a singe.' It made her laugh so. I think she was pleased to have escaped with so little damage."

"That is just like Snow," said Thomas Godolphin.

Arrived at home, Miss Godolphin was in the same place, knitting still. It was half past nine,—too late for Thomas to pay his visit to Lady Sarah's. "Janet, I fear you have waited tea for us?" said Cecil.

"To be sure, child; I expected you home to it."

Cecil explained why they did not

come, telling of the accident to Mrs. Verrall. "Eh! but it's like the young!" said Janet, lifting her hands. "Careless! careless! she might have been burnt to death."

"She would have been very much more burnt had her dress not been silk," observed Thomas. "Had it been of muslin, like the sleeve, it must have caught."

Miss Godolphin laid down her knitting and approached the tea-table. None must preside at the meals but herself. She inquired of Thomas whether he was going out again.

"I suppose not," he answered, speaking, however, somewhat indecisively. "I should like to have gone, though. Snow tells me Sarah Anne is worse."

"Weaker, I conclude," said Janet.

"Weaker than she has been at all. He thinks there's no hope of her now. No: I will not disturb them," he decisively added. "It would be hard upon ten o'clock by the time I got there."

He took a seat near the fire. Janet went on preparing the tea. He and Cecil both knew that she would expect them to take a cup, whether they liked it or not.

"What sort of a night is it?" she asked.

"A lovely night," he answered.

"Calm and still, and the moon as bright as day. I wish a good strong wind would spring up and blow the sickness away; or a fortnight's hard frost."

"Oh, talking of wind, Thomas," interrupted Cecil, who had been putting her bonnet upon a side-table, "did Mrs. Verrall ask you if any thing could be done to the passages of Ashlydyat? She said she should. For the last few days, the sound of the wind has been so great in them as to disturb the house."

Janet laid down the tea-pot and faced her young sister, a strange expression of dismay upon her face. "Cecil!" she uttered, below her breath.

Cecil was surprised. Janet turned to Thomas and gazed at him inquir-

ingly. But his face remained quite impassive. Janet took up the tea-pot again.

"What a loud ring!" exclaimed Cecil, as the hall-bell, pulled with no gentle hand, echoed and echoed through the house. "Should it be Bessy come home, she thinks she will let us know who's there."

It was not Bessy. A servant entered the room with a telegraphic despatch. "The man is waiting, sir," he said, holding out the paper for signature to his master.

Thomas Godolphin affixed his signature, and took up the despatch. It came from Scotland. Janet laid her hand upon it ere it was open: her face looked ghastly pale. "A moment of preparation!" she said. "Thomas, it may have brought us the tidings that we have no longer a father."

"Nay, Janet, do not anticipate evil," he answered, though his memory flew unaccountably back to that ugly shadow, and to what he had deemed would be Janet's conclusions respecting it. "It may not be ill news at all."

He glanced his eye rapidly and privately over it, while Cecil came and stood near him with a stifled sob. Then he held it out to Janet, reading it aloud at the same time.

"Lady Godolphin to Thomas Godolphin, Esquire.

"Come at once to Broomhead. Sir George wishes it. Take the first train."

"He is not dead, at any rate, Janet," said Thomas, quietly. "Thank heaven!"

Janet, her extreme fears relieved, took refuge in displeasure. "What does Lady Godolphin mean by sending a vague message like that?" she uttered. "Is Sir George worse? Is he ill? Is he in danger? Or has the summons not reference at all to his state of health?"

Thomas had taken it in his hand again, and was studying the words — as we are all apt to do when in uncertainty. He could make no more out of them.

"Lady Godolphin should have been more explicit," he resumed.

"Lady Godolphin has no *right* thus to play upon our fears, upon our suspense," said Janet. "Thomas, I have a great mind to start this night for Scotland."

"As you please, of course, Janet. It is a long and fatiguing journey for a winter's night."

"And I object to being a guest at Broomhead, unless driven to it by compulsion, you might add," rejoined Janet. "But our father may be dying."

"I should think not, Janet. Lady Godolphin would certainly have said it. Margery, too, would have taken care that those tidings should be sent to us."

The suggestion reassured Miss Godolphin. She had not thought of it. Margery, entirely devoted to the interests of Sir George and his children (somewhat in contravention to the interests of my lady) would undoubtedly have apprized them were Sir George in danger. "What shall you do?" inquired Janet of her brother.

"I shall do as the despatch desires me,—take the first train. Which will be at midnight."

"Give it to me again," said Janet.

He put the despatch in her hand, and she sat down with it, apparently studying its every word. "Vague! vague! can any thing be by possibility more vague?" she complained. "It leaves us utterly in doubt of the motive for sending. Lady Godolphin must have done it purposely to try our feelings."

"She has done it in carelessness," surmised Thomas.

"Which is as reprehensible as the other," severely answered Janet. "Thomas, *should* you find danger when you get there, you will not lose a moment in telegraphing to me."

"I should be sure to do so," was his answer.

"Where are you going?" continued Janet,—for he was preparing to go out.

"As far as Lady Sarah's."

Leaving the warm room for the street, the night air seemed to strike upon him with a chill, which he had not experienced when he went out previously, and he returned and put on his great-coat. He could not leave Prior's Ash before midnight, unless he had commanded a special train, which the circumstances did not appear to call for. At 12-5 a mail-train passed through the place, stopping at the station; and by that he resolved to go.

Grame House, as you may remember, was situated at the opposite end of the town to Ashlydyat, past All Souls' Church. Thomas Godolphin walked briskly along the pavement, his thoughts running upon many things, but chiefly on the unsatisfactory despatch. Very unsatisfactory he felt it to be; almost unpardonably so: and a vague fear crossed and recrossed his mind that Sir George might be in danger. Looking at it from a sober point of view, his judgment said No. But we cannot always look at suspense soberly: neither could Thomas Godolphin.

A dark figure was leaning over the rectory gate, shaded by the dark trees from the rays of the moon. But though the features of the face were obscure, the outline of the clerical hat was visible; and by that Mr. Hastings could be known. Thomas Godolphin stopped.

"You are going this way late," said the rector.

"It is late for a visit to Lady Sarah's. But I wish particularly to see them."

"I have now come from thence," returned Mr. Hastings.

"Sarah Anne grows weaker, I hear."

"Ay. I have been saying prayers over her."

Thomas Godolphin felt shocked. "Is she so near death as that?" he asked, in a hushed tone.

"So near death as that!" repeated the clergyman, in an accent of reproof. "I did not think to hear a like remark

from Mr. Godolphin. My good friend, is it only when death is near that we are to pray?"

"It is mostly when death is near that prayers are said *over us*," replied Thomas Godolphin.

"True,—for those who have known when and how to pray for themselves. Look at that girl: passing away from among us with all her worldly thoughts, her selfish habits, her evil, peevish temper! But that God's ways are not as our ways, we might be tempted to question why such as these are removed; such as Ethel left: the one child as near akin to an angel as it is well possible to be, here; the other —. In our blind judgment, we may wonder that she, most ripe for heaven, should not be taken to it, and that other one left, to be pruned and dug around,—to have, in short, a chance given her of making herself better."

"Is she so very ill?"

"I think her so: as does Snow. It was what he had said that sent me up. Her frame of mind is not a desirable one; and I have been trying to do my part. I shall be with her again tomorrow."

Thomas Godolphin walked onwards. Ere he had gone many steps, he remembered that Maria Hastings was at Broomhead, and it might be civil to tell the rector of his journey. "Have you any message for your daughter?" he asked. "I start in two hours time for Scotland." And then he explained why,—telling of their uncertainty.

"When shall you be coming back again?" inquired Mr. Hastings.

"Within a week, unless my father's state should forbid it. I may be wishing to take a holiday at Christmas time, or thereabouts; so shall not stay away now. George is absent, too."

"Staying at Broomhead?"

"No: he is not at Broomhead now."

"Will you take charge of Maria back again? We want her home."

"If you wish it, I will. But I should think they would all be return-

ing very shortly. Christmas is intended to be spent here."

"You may depend upon it, Christmas will not see Lady Godolphin at Prior's Ash unless the fever shall have departed to spend its Christmas in some other place," cried the rector.

"Well, I shall hear their plans when I get there."

"Bring Maria with you, Mr. Godolphin. Tell her it is my wish. Unless you find that there's a prospect of her speedy return with Lady Godolphin. In that case you may leave her."

"Very well," replied Thomas Godolphin.

He continued his way, and Mr. Hastings looked after him in the bright moonlight till his form disappeared in the shadows cast by the road-side trees.

It was striking ten as Thomas Godolphin opened the iron gate at Lady Sarah Grame's: the heavy booming bell of the clock at All Souls' came sounding against his ear in the stillness of the calm night. The house, all save from one window, looked dark: even the hall-lamp was out, and he feared they might all have retired. From that window a dull light shone behind the blind: a stationary light it had been of late, to be seen by any nocturnal wayfarer all night long; for it came from the sick-chamber.

Elizabeth opened the door. "Oh, sir!" she exclaimed, in the surprise of seeing him so late, "I think Miss Ethel has gone up to bed."

Lady Sarah came running down the stairs as he stepped into the hall: she also was surprised at the late visit.

"I would not have disturbed you, but that I am about to depart for Broomhead," he explained. "A telegraphic despatch has arrived from Lady Godolphin, calling me thither. I should like to see Ethel, if convenient. I know not how long I may be away."

"I sent Ethel to bed: her head ached," said Lady Sarah. "It is not many minutes since she went up. Oh, Mr. Godolphin, this has been such a

lay of grief! heads and hearts alike aching."

Thomas Godolphin entered the drawing-room, and Lady Sarah Grame proceeded to her younger daughter's chamber. Softly opening the door, she looked in. Ethel, undisturbed by the noise of Thomas Godolphin's visit,—for she had not supposed it to be a visit relating to her,—was kneeling down beside the bed, saying her prayers, her fair face buried in her hands, her hands buried in the counterpane, and the light from the candle shining on her smooth hair. A minute or two, during which Lady Sarah remained still, and then Ethel rose. She had not yet begun to undress.

It was the first intimation she had that any one was there, and she recoiled with surprise. "Mamma, how you startled me! Sarah Anne is not worse?"

"She can't well be worse on this side the grave. I don't know what you would have, Ethel!" was the peevish retort. "Mr. Godolphin is below and wants to see you."

She went down instantly. Lady Sarah did not accompany her, but passed into her sick daughter's room. The fire in the drawing-room was alight still, and Elizabeth had been in to stir it up. Thomas Godolphin stood over it with Ethel, telling her of his coming journey and its cause. The red embers threw a glow upon her face: her brow looked heavy, her eyes swollen.

He saw the signs, and laid his hand fondly upon her head. "What has given you the headache, Ethel?"

The ready tears came into her eyes, glistening on her eyelids. "It does ache very much," she answered.

"Has crying caused it?"

"Yes," she replied. "It is of no use to deny it, for you would see it by my swollen eyelids. I have wept to-day until it seems that I can weep no longer, and it has made my eyes ache and my head dull and heavy."

"But, my darling, you should not give way to this grief. It may render you seriously ill."

"Oh, Thomas, how can I help it?" she returned, with emotion, as the tears dropped swiftly over her cheeks. "We begin to see that there is no chance of Sarah Anne's recovery. Mr. Snow told mamma so to-day; and he sent up Mr. Hastings."

"Ethel, will your grieving alter it?"

Ethel wept silently. There was full and entire confidence between her and Thomas Godolphin: she could tell out all her thoughts, her troubles to him, as she could have told them to a mother,—if she had had a mother who loved her.

"If she were but a little more fit to go, the pain would seem less," breathed Ethel. "That is, we might feel more reconciled to losing her. But you know what she is, Thomas. When I have tried to talk a little bit about heaven, or to read a psalm to her, she would not listen: she said it made her dull, it gave her the horrors. How can she, who has never thought of God, be fit to meet him?"

Ethel's tears were deepening into sobs. Thomas Godolphin involuntarily thought of what Mr. Hastings had just said to him. His hand still rested on the head of Ethel.

"You are fit to meet him!" he exclaimed, involuntarily. "Ethel, whence can have arisen the difference between you? You are sisters; reared in the same home."

"I do not know," said Ethel, simply. "I have always thought a great deal about heaven; I suppose it is that. A lady, whom we knew as children, used to buy us a good many story-books, and mine were always stories of heaven. It was that which first got me into the habit of thinking of it."

"And why not Sarah Anne?"

"Sarah Anne would not read them. She liked stories of gayety; balls, and such-like."

Thomas smiled; the words were so simple and natural. "Had the fiat gone forth for you, instead of for her, Ethel, it would have brought you no dismay."

"Only that I must leave all my dear ones behind me," she answered, looking up at him, a bright smile shining through her tears. "I should know that God would not take me, unless it were for the best. Oh, Thomas, if we could but save her!"

"Child, you contradict yourself. If what God does must be for the best—and it is—that thought should reconcile you to the parting with Sarah Anne."

"Yes," hesitated Ethel. "Only I fear she has never thought of it herself, or in any way prepared for it."

"Do you know that I have to find fault with you?" resumed Thomas Godolphin, after a pause. "You have not been true to me, Ethel."

She turned her eyes upon him in complete surprise, the tears drying up.

"Did you not promise me—did you not promise Mr. Snow—not to enter your sister's chamber while the fever was upon her? I hear that you were in it often,—her head nurse."

The hot color flushed into the face of Ethel. "Forgive me, Thomas," she whispered. "I could not help myself. Sarah Anne—it was on the third morning of her illness, when I was getting up—suddenly began to cry out for me very much, and mamma came to my bed-room and desired me to go to her. I said that Mr. Snow had forbidden me, and that I had promised you. It made mamma angry; she asked if I could be so selfish as to regard a promise before Sarah Anne's life; that she might die if I thwarted her: and she took me by the arm and pulled me in. I would have told you, Thomas, that I had broken my word; I wished to tell you; but mamma forbid me."

Thomas Godolphin stood looking after her. There was nothing to answer: he had *known*, in his deep and trusting love, that the fault had not lain with Ethel. She mistook his silence, thinking he was vexed.

"You know, Thomas, so long as I am here in mamma's home, her child,

it is to her that I owe obedience," she gently pleaded. "As soon as I shall be your wife, I shall owe it and give it implicitly to you."

"You are right, my darling."

"And it was productive of no ill consequences," she resumed. "I did not catch the fever. Had I found myself growing in the least ill, I should have sent for you and told you the truth."

"Ethel," he impulsively cried, very impulsively for calm Thomas Godolphin, "had you caught the fever, I should never have forgiven those who led you into the danger. I *could not* lose you."

"Hark!" said Ethel. "Mamma is calling."

Lady Sarah had been calling to Mr. Godolphin. Thinking she was not heard, she now came down the stairs and entered the room, wringing her hands; her eyes were moist, her sharp, thin nose was redder than usual. "Oh dear, I don't know what we shall do with her!" she uttered. "She is so ill, and it makes her so fretful. Mr. Godolphin, nothing will satisfy her now but she must see you."

"See me!" repeated he.

"She will, she says. I told her you were departing for Scotland, and she burst out crying, and said if she was to die she should never see you again. Do you mind going in? You are not afraid?"

"No, I am not afraid," said Thomas Godolphin. "The infection cannot have remained all this while. And if it had, I should not fear it."

Lady Sarah Grame led the way up-stairs. Thomas followed her. Ethel stole in afterwards. Sarah Anne lay in bed, her thin face, drawn and white, raised upon the pillow; her hollow eyes were strained forward with a fixed look. Ill as he had been led to suppose her, he was scarcely prepared to see her like this; and it shocked him. A cadaverous face, looking ripe for the tomb.

"Why have you never come to see me?" she asked, in her hollow voice, as he approached and leaned over her.

"You'd never have come till I died. You only care for Ethel."

"I would have come to see you had I known you wished it," he answered. "But you do not look strong enough to receive visitors."

"They might cure me if they would," she continued, her breath panting. "I want to go away somewhere, and that Snow won't let me. If it were Ethel, he would take care to cure her."

"He will let you go as soon as you are equal to it, I am sure," said Thomas Godolphin.

"Why should the fever have come to me at all?—why couldn't it have gone to Ethel instead? She's strong. She'd have got well in no time. It's not fair——"

"My dear child, my dear, dear child, you must not excite yourself," implored Lady Sarah, abruptly interrupting her.

"I shall speak," cried Sarah Anne, with a touch, feeble though it was, of her old peevish vehemence. "Nobody's thought of but Ethel. If you had had your way," looking hard at Mr. Godolphin, "she'd not have been allowed to come near me; no, not if I had died."

She altered into wimpering tears. Lady Sarah whispered to him to leave the room: it would not do, this excitement. Thomas wondered why he had been brought to it. "I will come and see you again when you are better," he soothingly whispered.

"No you won't," sobbed Sarah Anne. "You are going to Scotland, and I shall be dead when you come back. I don't want to die. Why do they frighten me with their prayers? Good-by, Thomas Godolphin."

The last words were called after him, when he had taken his leave of her and was quitting the room. Lady Sarah attended him to the threshold: her eyes full, her hands lifted. "You may see that there's no hope of her!" she wailed.

Thomas did not think there was the slightest. To his eye—though it was not so practiced an eye in sickness as Mr. Snow's, or even as that

of the rector of All Souls'—it appeared that in a very few days, perhaps hours, hope for Sarah Anne Grame would be over forever.

Ethel waited for him in the hall, and was leading the way back to the drawing-room; but he told her that he could not stay longer, and opened the front-door. She ran past him into the garden, putting her hand in his as he came out.

"I wish you were not going away," she sadly said, her spirits that night very unequal, causing her to see things with a gloomy eye.

"I wish you were going with me!" replied Thomas Godolphin. "Do not weep, Ethel. I shall soon be back again."

"Every thing seems to make me weep to-night. You may not be back until,—until the worst is over. Oh, if she might but be saved!"

He held her face close to him, gazing down at it in the moonlight. And then he took from it his farewell kiss. "God bless you, my darling, forever and forever!"

"May he bless you, Thomas!" she answered with streaming eyes: and, for the first time in her life, his kiss was returned. Then they parted. He watched Ethel in-doors, and went back to Prior's Ash.

CHAPTER XII.

DEAD!

"THOMAS, my son, I must go home. I don't want to die away from Ashlydyat!"

A dull pain shot across Thomas Godolphin's heart at the words. Did he think of the old superstitious tradition—that evil was to fall upon the Godolphins when their chief should die, and not at Ashlydyat? At Ashlydyat his father could not die; he had put that out of his power when he let it to strangers: in its neighborhood, he might.

"The better plan, sir, will be for you to return to the Folly, as you seem to wish it," said Thomas. "You will soon be strong enough to undertake the journey."

The decaying knight was sitting on a sofa in his bed-room. His second fainting-fit had lasted some hours—if that, indeed, was the proper name to give to it—and he had recovered, only to be more and more weak. He had grown pretty well after the first attack,—when Margery had found him in his chamber on the floor, the day Lady Godolphin had gone to pay her visit to Selina. The next time, he was on the lawn before the house, talking to Charlotte Pain, when he suddenly fell to the ground. He did not recover his consciousness until evening; and, nearly the first wish he expressed, was a desire to see his son Thomas. "Telegraph for him," he said to Lady Godolphin.

"But, you are not seriously ill, Sir George," she answered.

"No, but I should like him here. Telegraph to him to start by first train."

Which was what Lady Godolphin did, accordingly, sending the message that angered Miss Godolphin. But, in this case, Lady Godolphin did not deserve so much blame as Janet cast to her: for she did debate the point with herself whether she should say Sir George was ill or not. Relieving herself that these two fainting-fits had proceeded from want of strength only, that they were but the effect of his long previous illness, and would be productive of no bad result, she determined not to speak of it. Hence the imperfect message.

Neither did Thomas Godolphin see much cause for fear when he arrived at Broomhead. Sir George did not look better than when he had quitted Prior's Ash, but neither did he look much worse. On this, the second day, he had been well enough to converse with Thomas upon business affairs: and, that over, he suddenly broke out with the above wish. Thomas mentioned it when he joined

Lady Godolphin afterwards. It did not meet her approbation.

"You should have opposed it entirely," said she to him, in a firm, hard tone.

"But why so, madam?" asked Thomas. "If my father's wish is to return to Prior's Ash, he should return."

"Not while the fever lingers there. Were he to take it—and die—you would never forgive yourself."

Thomas had no fear of the fever on his own score, and did not fear it for his father. He intimated as much. "It is not the fever that will hurt him, Lady Godolphin."

"You have no right to say that. Lady Sarah Grame, a month ago, might have said she did not fear it for Sarah Anne. And now Sarah Anne is dying!"

"Or dead," put in Charlotte Pain, who was leaning listlessly against the window-frame, devoured with ennui.

"Yes; or dead," assented Lady Godolphin. "You confess you did not think she could last more than a day or two, the night you left."

"I certainly did not," said Thomas. "She looked fearfully ill and emaciated. But that has nothing to do with Sir George."

"I cannot conceive how you could have been so imprudent as to venture into Sarah Anne Grame's chamber!" emphatically cried my lady. "Indeed, that you went to the house at all while the sickness was in it, one can only wonder at."

"There could be no risk in my going into the chamber, Lady Godolphin. Nothing is the matter with her now, but debility."

"You don't know, Thomas Godolphin, when risk ends or when it begins," retorted Lady Godolphin. "But that so many hours had elapsed before you came here, and you were in all the blow of the railway journey, I should not have thanked you."

Thomas smiled. But he wished he had said nothing of his visit to the sick-chamber, for he was one of those who observe strict consideration for

the feelings and prejudices of others. There was no help for it now. He turned to Maria Hastings.

"Shall you be afraid to go back to Prior's Ash?"

"Not at all," replied Maria. "I should not mind if I were going to-day, so far as the fever is concerned."

"That is well," he said. "Because I have orders to convey you back thither with me."

Charlotte Pain lifted her head with a start. The news aroused her. Maria, on the contrary, thought he was speaking in jest.

"No, indeed I am not," said Thomas Godolphin. "Mr. Hastings made a request to me, madam, that I would take charge of his daughter when I returned," continued he to Lady Godolphin. "He wants her back, he says."

"Mr. Hastings is very polite!" ironically replied my lady. "Maria will go back when I choose to spare her."

"I hope you will allow her to return with me,—unless you shall soon be returning yourself," said Thomas Godolphin.

"It is not I that shall be returning to Prior's Ash yet," said my lady. "The sickly old place must give proof of its renewed health first. You will not get either me or Sir George there on this side Christmas."

"Then I think, Lady Godolphin, you must offer no objection to my taking charge of Maria," said Thomas, courteously, but firmly, leaving the discussion of Sir George's return to another opportunity. "I passed my word to Mr. Hastings."

Charlotte Pain, all animation now, approached Lady Godolphin. She was thoroughly sick and tired of Broomhead; since George Godolphin's departure, she had been projecting how she could get away from it. Here was the solution of her difficulty.

"Dear Lady Godolphin, you must allow me to depart with Mr. Godolphin,—whatever you may do by Maria Hastings," she exclaimed. "I said

nothing to you,—for I really did not see how I was to get back, knowing you would not permit me to travel so far alone,—but Mrs. Verrall is very urgent for my return. And now that she is suffering from this burn, as Mr. Godolphin has brought us news, it is the more incumbent upon me to be at home."

Which was a nice little fib of Miss Charlotte's. Her sister had never once hinted that she wished her to go home: but, a fib or two, more or less, was nothing to Charlotte.

"You are tired of Broomhead," said Lady Godolphin.

Charlotte's color never varied, her eye never drooped, as she protested that she should not tire of Broomhead were she its inmate for a twelvemonth;—that it was quite a paradise upon earth. Maria kept her head bent while Charlotte said it, half afraid lest unscrupulous Charlotte should call upon her to bear testimony to its truth. But that very morning she had protested to Maria that the ennuis of the place was killing her.

"I don't know," said Lady Godolphin, shrewdly. "Unless I am wrong, Charlotte, you have been anxious to quit it. What was it that Mr. George hinted at,—about escorting you young ladies back, and I stopped him ere it was half spoken? Prior's Ash would talk if I sent you home under his convoy."

"Mr. Godolphin is not George," rejoined Charlotte.

"No. He is not," replied my lady, significantly.

"Lady Godolphin, pardon me if I urge our departure upon you," said Charlotte. "I think you ought to allow us to take advantage of this opportunity to return. A sick-house may be better without us. We are of no use to Sir George: and Margery said openly the other night that we should be better away. In his uncertain state it is hard to say when you may be able to get away, and we might be kept here all the winter, waiting for an escort."

Lady Godolphin made no reply to

this, but she did not seem to reject the reasoning, if her manner might be any criterion. "How many of those miserable Bonds have the fever taken off?" she asked of Thomas Godolphin.

"Bond himself, and the son."

"Why, the very two who could be least well spared!" exclaimed my lady, as if she were reasoning upon the most worldly matter. "But the wife and young ones won't be much worse off without them, for they spent all their earnings upon themselves."

"Had they been in the habit of spending less upon themselves, they might not have succumbed to the fever. So Mr. Snow says."

"What does Snow think of the fever? That it will linger long?"

"On the night I came away, he told me he believed it was at last going. I hope he will prove right. You may be at Prior's Ash yet, Lady Godolphin, to eat your Christmas dinner."

The subject of departure was settled amicably; both the young ladies were to return to Prior's Ash under the charge of Mr. Godolphin. There are some men, single men though they be, and not men in years, whom society is content to recognize as entirely fit escorts. Thomas Godolphin was one. Had my lady despatched the young ladies home under the wing of Mr. George, she might never have heard the last of it from Prior's Ash: but the most inveterate scandal-monger in it, would not have questioned the thorough trustworthiness of his elder brother. My lady was also brought to give her consent to her own departure for it by Christmas, provided Mr. Snow would assure her that the place was "safe."

Thomas Godolphin spoke to his father of his marriage arrangements. He had received a letter from Janet, written the morning after his departure, in which she agreed to the proposal that Ethel should be her temporary guest. This removed all barrier to the immediate union.

"But, Thomas, if Sarah Anne

should die?" debated Sir George. The conversation was taking place on the day prior to that fixed for their quitting Broomhead, where Thomas had now been four days.

"In that case, I suppose it would have to be postponed," he replied. "But, I argue better news. That she is not dead yet, is certain, or else they would have written to me. And in these cases, if a patient can struggle on through the first extreme debility, recovery may supervene."

"Have you heard from Ethel?"

"No. I have written to her twice. But in each letter I told her I should soon be home: therefore she most likely would not write, thinking it might miss me. Had the worst happened, they would have written at all hazards."

"Then you marry directly, if Sarah Anne lives?"

"Directly. In January at the latest."

"God bless you both!" cried the old knight. "She'll be a wife in a thousand, Thomas."

Thomas thought she would. He did not say it.

"It's the best plan,—it's the best plan," continued Sir George, in a dreamy tone, gazing into the fire. "No use to turn the girls out of their home. It will not be for long,—not for long. Thomas,"—turning his haggard but still fine blue eye upon his son,—"I wish I had never left Ashlydyat!"

Thomas was silent. None had more bitterly regretted the departure from it than he."

"I wish I could go back to it to die!"

"My dear father, I hope that you will yet live many years to bless us. If you can get through this winter,—and I see no reason whatever why you should not, with care,—you may regain your strength and be as well again as any of us."

Sir George shook his head. "It will not be, Thomas. I shall not long keep you out of Ashlydyat. Mind!" he added, turning upon Thomas with

surprising energy, "I will go back before Christmas to Prior's Ash. The last Christmas that I shall see shall be spent with my children."

"Yes, indeed I think you should come back," warmly acquiesced Thomas.

"Therefore, if you find, when Christmas is close upon us, that I am not amongst you,—that you hear no tidings of my coming amongst you,—you come off here at once and fetch me. Do you hear, Thomas? I enjoin it upon you now with a father's authority: do not forget it, or disobey it. My lady fears the fever, and would keep me; but I must be at Prior's Ash."

"I will certainly obey you, my father," replied Thomas Godolphin.

Telegraphic despatches seemed to be the order of the day with Thomas Godolphin. They were all sitting together that evening, Sir George having come down-stairs, when a servant called Thomas out of the room. A telegraphic message had arrived for him at the station, and a man had brought it over. A conviction of what it contained flashed over Thomas Godolphin's heart as he opened it,—the death of Sarah Anne Gramer.

From Lady Sarah it proved to be. Not a much more satisfactory message than had been Lady Godolphin's; for if hers had been unexplanatory, this was incoherent:

"The breath has just gone out of my dear child's body. I will write by next post. She died at four o'clock. How shall we all bear it?"

Thomas returned to the room, his mind full. In the midst of his sorrow and regret for Sarah Anne, his compassion for Lady Sarah,—and he did feel all that with true sympathy,—intruded the thoughts of his own marriage: it must be postponed now.

"What did Andrew want with you?" asked Sir George, when he entered.

"A telegraphic message had come for me from Prior's Ash."

"A business message?"

"No, sir. It is from Lady Sarah."

By the tone of his voice, by the

falling of his countenance, they could read instinctively what had occurred. But they kept silence,—all,—waiting for him to speak further.

"Poor Sarah Anne is gone. She died at four o'clock."

"This will make a delay in your plans, Thomas," observed Sir George, after some minutes had been given to expressions of regret.

"It will, sir."

The knight leaned over to his son, and spoke in a whisper, meant for his ear alone: "I shall not be very long after her. I feel that I shall not. You may yet take Ethel home at once to Ashlydyat."

Very early indeed did they start in the morning, long before daybreak. Prior's Ash they would reach, all things being well, at nine at night. Margery was sent to attend them,—a very dragon of a guardian, as particular as Miss Godolphin herself,—had a guardian been necessary.

Charlotte Pain did not conceal her delight at her escape, in spite of the presence of Margery, who might tell tales. "Only think what it was for me, Mr. Godolphin!" she exclaimed.

"You found it dull?" replied Thomas.

"Dull! Had I been condemned to remain in it another week, I should have been fit to hang myself," was Charlotte's answer.

"Why did you come to it, Miss Pain?" jerked out Margery, resentfully, who was accustomed to say what she thought, no matter to whom.

"That is my own business, and not yours, Margery, woman," reproved Charlotte.

A somewhat weary day,—a long one, at any rate,—and their train steamed into the station at Prior's Ash. It was striking nine. Mr. Hastings was waiting for Maria, and Mrs. Verrall's carriage for Charlotte Pain. A few minutes were spent in collecting the luggage.

"Shall I give you a seat as far as the bank, Mr. Godolphin?" inquired Charlotte, who must pass it on her way to Ashlydyat.

"Thank you, no. I shall just go up for a minute's call upon Lady Sarah Grame."

Mr. Hastings, who had been putting Maria into a fly, heard the words. He turned hastily, caught Thomas Godolphin's hand, and drew him aside.

"Are you aware of what has occurred?"

"Alas, yes!" replied Thomas. "Lady Sarah telegraphed to me last night."

The rector pressed his hand, and returned to his daughter. Thomas Godolphin struck off to a by-path, a short cross-cut from the station, which would take him to Grame House.

Six days ago exactly, it was, since he was there before. The house looked precisely as it had looked then, all in darkness, save for the dull light that burned from Sarah Anne's chamber. It burnt there still. Then it was lighting the living: now——

Thomas Godolphin rang gently at the bell. Does anybody like to go with a fierce peal to a house where death is an inmate? Elizabeth, as was usual, opened the door, and burst into tears when she saw who it was. "I said it would bring you back, sir!" she exclaimed.

"Does Lady Sarah bear it pretty well?" he asked, as she showed him into the drawing-room.

"No, sir: not over well," sobbed the girl. "I'll tell my lady that you are here."

He stood over the fire, as he had done the other night: it was low now, —like it had been then. Strangely still seemed the house: he could have almost told that one was lying dead in it. He listened,—waiting for the step of Ethel, hoping she would be the first to come to him.

Elizabeth returned. "My lady says would you be so good as walk up to her, sir?"

Thomas Godolphin followed her upstairs. She made for the room to which he had been taken the former night,—Sarah Anne's chamber. In

point of fact, the chamber of Lady Sarah; but it had been given up to Sarah Anne for her illness. Elizabeth, with soft, stealthy tread, crossed the corridor to the door, and opened it.

Was she going to show him into the presence of the dead? He thought she must have mistaken Lady Sarah's orders, and he hesitated on the threshold.

"Where is Miss Ethel?" he whispered.

"Who, sir?"

"Miss Ethel. Is she well?"

The girl stared at him, flung the door full open, and gave a great cry as she flew down the staircase.

He looked after her in amazement. Had she gone mad? Then he turned and walked into the room with a hesitating step.

Lady Sarah was coming forward to meet him. She was convulsed with grief. He took both her hands in his with a soothing gesture, essaying a word of comfort,—not of inquiry, why she should have brought him to this room. He glanced to the bed, expecting to see the corpse upon it; but the bed was empty. And at that moment his eyes caught another sight.

Seated by the fire in an invalid-chair, surrounded with pillows, covered with shawls, with a wan, attenuated face, and eyes that seemed to have a glaze over them, was,—*who?*

Sarah Anne? It certainly *was* Sarah Anne, and in life yet. For she feebly held out her hand in welcome, and the tears suddenly gushed from her eyes. "I am getting better, Mr. Godolphin."

Thomas Godolphin,—Thomas Godolphin,—how shall I write it? For one blessed minute he was utterly blind to what it could all mean: his whole mind was a chaos of astonished perplexity. And then, as the dreadful truth burst upon him, he staggered against the wall, with a wailing cry of agony.

It was Ethel who had died.

CHAPTER XIII.

UNAVAILING REGRETS.

YES. It was Ethel who had died.

Thomas Godolphin leaned against the wall in his shock of agony. It was one of those moments that can fall only once in a lifetime: in many lives never: when the greatest limit of earthly misery bursts upon the startled spirit, shattering it for all time. Were Thomas Godolphin to live for a hundred years, he never could know another moment like this,—the power so to feel would have left him.

It had not left him yet. Nay: it had scarcely come to him in its full realization. At present he was half-stunned. Strange as it may seem, the first impression upon his mind was that he was so much nearer to the next world. How am I to define this "nearer?" It was not that he was nearer to it by time, or in goodness,—nothing of that. *She* had passed within its portals; and the great gulf, which divides time from eternity, seemed to be but a span now to Thomas Godolphin: it was as if he, in spirit, had followed her in. From being a place far, far off,—vague, indefinite, indistinct,—it had been suddenly brought to him close and palpable, or he to it. Had Thomas Godolphin been an atheist, denying a hereafter,—Heaven in its compassion have mercy upon all such!—that one moment of suffering would have recalled him to a sense of his mistake. It was as if he looked aloft with the eyes of inspiration and saw the truth: it was as a brief, passing moment of revelation from God. She, with her loving spirit, her gentle heart, her simple trust in God, had been taken from this world to enter upon a better. She was as surely living in it,—had entered upon its mysteries, its joys, its rest, as that he was living here: she, he believed, was as surely regarding him now and his great sorrow, as that he was left alone to battle with it. From henceforth, Thomas Godol-

phin possessed a lively, ever-present link with that world; and knew that its gates would, in God's good time, be opened for him.

These feelings, impressions, facts—you may designate them as you please—took up their place in his mind all in that first instant, and seated themselves there forever. Not yet very consciously. To his stunned senses, in his weight of bitter grief, nothing could be to him very clear: ideas passed through his brain quickly, confusedly,—like unto the changing scenes in a phantasmagoria. He looked round as one bewildered. The bed smoothed ready for occupancy, on which on entering he had expected to see the dead, but not *her*, was between him and the door. Sarah Anne Grame in her invalid-chair by the fire, a table at her right hand covered with adjuncts of the sick-room,—a medicine-bottle with its accompanying wine-glass and table-spoon, jelly and other delicacies to tempt a faded appetite,—Sarah Anne sat there and gazed at him with her dark, hollow eyes, from which the tears dropped slowly on her cadaverous cheeks. Lady Sarah stood before him, sobs choking her voice, wringing her hands. Ay: both were weeping. But he,—it is not in the presence of others that man gives way to grief; neither will tears come to him in the first leaden weight of anguish.

Thomas Godolphin listened mechanically, as one who cannot do otherwise, to the explanations of Lady Sarah. "Why did you not prepare me?—why did you let it come upon me with this startling shock?" was his first remonstrance.

"I did prepare you," sobbed Lady Sarah. "I telegraphed to you last night as soon as it had happened. I wrote the message with my own hand and sent it off to the office before I turned my attention to any other thing."

"I received the message. But you did not say,—I thought it was,—" Thomas Godolphin turned his glance on Sarah Anne. He remembered her state in the midst of his own anguish, and would not alarm her. "You did

not mention Ethel's name," he continued, to Lady Sarah. "How could I suppose you alluded to her, or that she was ill?"

Sarah Anne divined his motive of hesitation. She was uncommonly keen in penetration,—sharp, as the world says,—and she had noted his words on entering, when he began to soothe Lady Sarah for the loss of a child; she had noted his startled recoil when his eyes fell on her. She spoke up with a touch of her old querulousness, the tears arrested on her face, and her eyes glistening.

"You thought it was I who had died! Yes you did, Mr. Godolphin, and you need not attempt to deny it. You would not have cared so that it was not Ethel."

Thomas Godolphin had no intention of contradicting her. He turned from Sarah Anne in silence to look inquiringly and reproachfully at her mother.

"Mr. Godolphin, I could not prepare you better than I did," said Lady Sarah. "When I wrote the letter to you, telling of her illness—"

"What letter?" interrupted Thomas Godolphin. "I received no letter."

"But you must have received it," returned Lady Sarah, in her quick and cross manner. Not cross with Thomas Godolphin, but from a rising doubt whether the letter had miscarried. "I wrote it, and I know that it was safely posted. You ought to have had it by last evening's delivery, before you could get the telegraphic dispatch."

"I never had it," said Thomas Godolphin. "When I waited in your drawing-room now, I was listening for Ethel's footsteps to come to me."

Thomas Godolphin knew, later, that the letter had arrived duly and safely at Broomhead at the time mentioned by Lady Sarah. Sir George Godolphin either did not open the box that night, or if he opened it he overlooked the letter for his son. Charlotte Pain's complaint, that the box ought not to be left to the charge of Sir George, bore reason in it. On the morning of his son's departure with

the young ladies, Sir George had found the letter, and at once dispatched it back to Prior's Ash. It was on its road then at this same hour when he was talking with Lady Sarah. But the shock had come.

He took a seat by the table, and covered his eyes with his hand as Lady Sarah gave him a detailed account of the illness and death. Not all the account, that she or anybody else could give, would take one iota from the dreadful fact staring him in the face. She was gone! Gone away forever from this world: he could never meet the glance of her eye again, or hear her voice in response to his own. Ah, my readers, there are griefs that tell! riving the heart as an earthquake will rive the earth; and all that can be done is, to sit down under them and ask of Heaven strength to bear,—to bear as we best may until time shall shed a few drops of healing balm from its wings.

On the last night that Thomas Godolphin had seen her, Ethel's brow and eyes were heavy. She had wept much in the day, and supposed the pain in her head to arise from that circumstance; she had given this explanation to Thomas Godolphin. Neither she nor he had had a thought that it could come from any other source. More than a month since Sarah Anne was taken with the fever, fears of it for Ethel had died out. And yet those dull eyes, that hot head, that heavy weight of pain, were only the symptoms of the sickness coming on! A night of tossing and turning, snatches of disturbed sleep, of terrifying dreams, and Ethel awoke to the conviction that the fever was upon her. About the time that she generally rose, she rang her bell for Elizabeth.

"I do not feel well," she said. "As soon as mamma is up, will you ask her to come to me. Do not disturb her before."

Elizabeth obeyed her orders. But Lady Sarah, tired and wearied out with her attendance upon Sarah Anne, with whom she had been up half the night, did not rise till between nine

and ten. The maid went to her then and delivered the message.

"In bed still! Miss Ethel in bed still!" exclaimed Lady Sarah. She spoke in much anger; for Ethel was wont to be up betimes and in attendance upon Sarah Anne. It was required of her so to be.

Flinging on a dressing-gown, Lady Sarah proceeded to Ethel's room; and there she broke into a storm of reproach and anger,—never waiting to ascertain what might be the matter with Ethel, any thing or nothing. "Ten o'clock, and that poor child to have lain till now with nobody to go near her but a servant!" she reiterated. "You have no feeling, Ethel."

Ethel drew the clothes from her flushed face, and turned her glistening eyes, dull last night, shining with the fever now, upon her mother. "Oh, mamma, I am ill, indeed I am! I can hardly lift my head for the pain. Feel how it is burning! I did not think I ought to get up."

"What is the matter with you?" sharply inquired Lady Sarah.

"I cannot quite tell," answered Ethel. "I only know that I feel ill all over. I feel, mamma, as if I could not get up."

"Very well! There's that dear, suffering angel lying alone, and you can think of yourself before her! If you choose to stop in bed, you must. But you will reproach yourself for your selfishness when she is gone. Another four-and-twenty hours, and she may be no longer with us. Do as you think proper."

Ethel burst into tears, and caught hold of her mother's robe as she was turning away. "Mamma, do not be angry with me! I trust I am not selfish. Mamma,"—and her voice sank to a whisper,—"I have been thinking that it may be the fever."

"The fever!" reproachfully echoed Lady Sarah. "Heaven help you for a selfish and a fanciful child! Did I not send you to bed with the headache last night, and what is it but the remains of that headache that you feel this morning? I can see what it is;

you have been fretting about the departure of Thomas Godolphin! Get up out of that hot bed and dress yourself, and come in and attend on your sister. You know she can't bear to be waited on by anybody but you. Get up, I say, Ethel."

Will Lady Sarah Grame remember that episode until death shall take her? I should, in her place. She suppressed all mention of it to Thomas Godolphin. "The dear child told me she did not feel well; but I only thought she had a headache, and that she would perhaps feel better up;" were the words in which she related it to him. What sort of a vulture, was gnawing at her heart, as she spoke them? It was true that, in her blind selfishness for that one, undeserving child, she had lost sight of the fact that illness could come to Ethel; she had not allowed herself to receive the probability; she who had accused of selfishness that devoted, generous girl, who was ready at all hours to put her hands under her sister's feet; who would have sacrificed her own life to save Sarah Anne's.

Ethel got up. Got up as she best could,—her limbs aching, her head burning. She went into Sarah Anne's room and did for her what she was able, gently, lovingly, anxiously, as of yore. Ah, child! let those who are left be thankful that it was so! it is well to be stricken down in the active path of duty, working till we can work no more.

She did so. She stayed where she was till the day was half gone,—bearing up, it was hard to say how. She could not touch breakfast: she could not touch any thing. None saw how ill she was. Lady Sarah was wilfully blind; Sarah Anne had eyes and thoughts for herself alone. "What are you shivering for?" Sarah Anne once fretfully asked her. "I feel cold, dear," was Ethel's unselfish answer: not a word said she further of her illness. In the early part of the afternoon, Lady Sarah was away from the room for some time on domestic affairs; and when she returned from it Mr.

Snow was with her, who had been prevented from calling earlier in the day. They found Sarah Anne dropped into a doze, and Ethel stretched on the floor before the fire, moaning. But the moans ceased as they entered.

Mr. Snow, regardless of the waking invalid, strode up to Ethel, and turned her face to the light. "How long has she been like this?" he cried out, his voice shrill with emotion. "Child! child! why did they not send for me?"

Alas! poor Ethel was even then too ill to reply. Mr. Snow carried her to her room with his own arms, and the servants undressed her and laid her in the bed from which she was never more to rise. The fever took violent hold of her; but not worse than it had done of Sarah Anne, scarcely as bad, and danger for Ethel was not looked for. Had Sarah Ann not got over a similar crisis, they would have feared for Ethel,—so given are we to judge by collateral circumstances. It was only on the third or fourth day that highly dangerous symptoms supervened, and then Lady Sarah wrote to Thomas Godolphin the letter which had not reached him. There was this much of negative consolation to be derived from the non-receipt; that, had it been delivered to him on the instant of its arrival, he could not have been in time to see her.

"You ought to have written to me as soon as she was taken ill," he observed to Lady Sarah.

"I would have done it had I apprehended danger," she repentantly answered. "But I never did. Mr. Snow never did. I thought how pleasant it would be to get her safe through the danger and the illness before you should know of it."

"Did she not wish me written to?"

The question was put firmly, abruptly, after the manner of one who will not be cheated of his answer. Lady Sarah dared not evade it. How could she equivocate, with her child lying dead above her head?

"It is true. She did wish it. It was on the first day of her illness that

she spoke. 'Write, and tell Thomas Godolphin.' She never said it but that once."

"And you did not?" he uttered, his voice hoarse with pain.

"Do not reproach me! do not reproach me!" cried Lady Sarah, clasping her hands in supplication, while the tears fell in showers from her eyes. "I did it for the best. I never supposed there was danger: I thought what a pity it was to bring you back all that long journey, putting you to so much unnecessary trouble and expense."

Trouble! expense! in a case like that! She could speak of expense to Thomas Godolphin! But he remembered how she had had to battle both with expense and trouble her whole life long,—that for her they must wear a formidable aspect; and he remained silent.

"I wish, now, I had written," she resumed, in the midst of her choking sobs. "As soon as Mr. Snow said there was danger, I wished it. But"—as if she would seek to excuse herself—"what with the two upon my hands,—she up-stairs, Sarah Anne here,—I had not a moment for proper reflection."

"Did you tell her you had not written?" he asked. "Or did you let her lie waiting for me, hour after hour, day after day, blaming me for my careless neglect?"

"She never blamed any one: you know she did not," wailed Lady Sarah; "and I believe she was too ill to think even of you. She was only sensible at times. Oh, I say, do not reproach me, Mr. Godolphin! I would give my own life to bring her back! I never knew her worth till she was gone. I never loved her as I love her now."

There could be no doubt that Lady Sarah Grame was reproaching herself far more bitterly than any reproach could tell upon her from Thomas Godolphin. An accusing conscience is the worst of all evils. She sat there, her head bent, swaying herself backwards and forwards on her chair,

moaning and crying. It was not a time, Thomas Godolphin felt, to say a word of her past heartless conduct in forcing Ethel to breathe the infection of Sarah Anne's sick-room. And all that he could say, all the reproaches, all the remorse and repentance, would not bring Ethel back to life.

"Would you like to see her?" whispered Lady Sarah, as he rose to leave.

"Yes."

She lighted a chamber-candle, and preceded him up-stairs. Ethel had died in her own room. At the door, Thomas Godolphin took the candle from Lady Sarah.

"I must go in alone."

He passed on into the chamber, and closed the door. On the bed, laid out in her white night-dress, lay what remained of Ethel Grame. Pale, still, pure, her face was wonderfully like what it had been in life, and a calm smile rested upon it.—But Thomas Godolphin wished to be alone!

Lady Sarah stood outside, leaning against the opposite wall, and weeping silently, the glimmer from the hall-lamp below faintly lighting the corridor. Once she fancied that a sound, as of choking sobs, struck upon her ears, and she caught up a small, black shawl that she wore, for grief had made her chilly, and flung it over her head, and wept the faster.

He came out by-and-by, calm and quiet as he ever was. He did not perceive Lady Sarah standing there in the shade, and went straight down, carrying the wax-light. Lady Sarah caught him up at the door of Sarah Anne's room, and took the light from him.

"She looks very peaceful, does she not?" was her whisper.

"She could not look otherwise."

He went on down alone, wishing to let himself out. But Elizabeth had heard his steps, and was already at the door. "Good-night, Elizabeth," he said, as he passed her.

The girl did not answer. She slipped out into the garden after him.

"Oh, sir! and didn't you know of it?" she whispered.

"No."

"If anybody was ever gone away to be an angel, sir, it's that sweet young lady," continued Elizabeth, letting her tears and sobs come forth as they would. "She was just one here! and she's gone to her own fit place."

"Ay. It is so."

"You should have been in this house throughout the whole of the illness, to have seen the difference between them, sir! Nobody would believe it. Miss Grame, angry, and snappish, and not caring who suffered, or who was ill, or who toiled, so that she was served: Miss Ethel, lying like a tender lamb, patient and meek, thankful for all that was done for her. It does seem hard, sir, that we should lose her forever."

"Not forever, Elizabeth," he answered.

"And that's true, too! But, sir, the worst is, one can't think of that sort of consolation just when one's troubles are the freshest. Good-night to you, sir."

Thomas Godolphin walked on, leaving the highroad for a less frequented path, the one by which he had come. About midway between this part and the railway-station, a cross-path, branching to the right, would take him into Prior's Ash. He went along, musing. In the depth of his great grief, there was no repining. He was one to trace the finger of God in all things. If Mrs. Godolphin had imbued him with superstitious feelings, she had also implanted within him something better: and a more entire trust in God it was perhaps impossible for any one to feel than was felt by Thomas Godolphin. It was what he lived under. He could not see why Ethel should have been taken,—why this great sorrow should fall upon him;—but that it must be for the best he implicitly believed. The best: for God had done it. How he was to live on without her he knew not. How he could support the lively an-

guish of the immediate future he did not care to think. All his hopes in this life gone! all his plans, his projects, uprooted by a single blow! never, any of them, to return. He might look yet for the bliss of a hereafter,—ay, that remains even for the most heavy-laden, thank God!—but his sun of happiness in this world had set forever.

Thomas Godolphin might have been all the better for a little sun then,—not speaking figuratively. I mean the good sun that illumines our daily world,—that would be illumining my pen and paper at this moment, but for a damp, ugly, envious fog, which obscures every thing but itself. The moon was not shining as it had been the last night he quitted Lady Sarah's, when he had left his farewell kiss—oh, that he could have known it was the last!—on the gentle lips of Ethel. There was no moon yet; the stars were not showing themselves, for a black cloud enveloped the skies like a pall,—fit accompaniment to his blasted hopes,—and his path altogether was dark. Little wonder, then, that Thomas Godolphin all but fell over some dark object crouching in his way: he could only save himself by springing back. By dint of a minute or two's peering he discovered it to be a woman. She was seated on the bare earth, her hands clasped under her knees, which were raised nearly level with her chin as it rested on them, and was swaying herself backwards and forwards as one does in grief, like Lady Sarah Grame had done not long before.

"Why do you sit here?" cried Thomas Godolphin. "I nearly fell over you."

"Little matter if ye'd fell over me and killed me," was the response of the woman, given without raising her head, or making a change in her position. "'Twould only have been one less in a awful cold world, as seems made for naught but trouble. If the one-half of us was out of it, there'd be room perhaps for them as was left."

"Is it Mrs. Bond?" asked Thomas

Godolphin, as he caught a better glimpse of her features.

"Didn't you know me, sir? I know'd you by the voice as soon as you spoke. You have got trouble, too, I hear. The world's full of nothing else. Why do it come?"

"Get up," said Thomas Godolphin. "Why do you sit there? Why are you here at all at this night-hour?"

"It's where I'm a-going to stop till morning," returned the woman, sullenly. "There shall be no getting-up for me."

"What is the matter with you?" he resumed.

"Trouble," she shortly answered. "I've been a-toiling up to the work'us, asking for a loaf, or a bit o' money,—any thing they'd give to me, just to keep body and soul together for my children. They turned me back again. They'll give me nothing. I may go into the union with the children if I will, but not a stiver of help 'll they afford me out of it. Me, with a corpse in the house, and a bare cubbort!"

"A corpse!" involuntarily repeated Thomas Godolphin. "Who is dead?"

"John."

Curtly as the word was spoken, the tone yet betrayed its own pain. This John, the eldest son of the Bonds, had been attacked with the fever at the same time as the father. The father had succumbed to it at once; the son had recovered, or at least had appeared to be recovering.

"I thought John was getting better," observed Thomas Godolphin.

"He might ha' got better, if he'd had things to make him better! Wine and meat and all the rest of it. He hadn't got 'em: and he's dead."

Now a subscription had been entered into for the relief of the poor sufferers from the fever, Godolphin, Crosse, and Godolphin having been amidst its most liberal contributors; and, to Thomas Godolphin's certain knowledge, a full share, and a very good share, had been handed to the Bonds,—quite sufficient to furnish suitable nourishment for John Bond

for some time to come. He did not say to the woman, "You have had enough: Where's it gone to? It has been wasted in riot." That it had been wasted in riot and improvidence there was no doubt; for it was in the nature of the Bonds so to waste it. To cast reproach in the hour of affliction was not the religion of common life practised by Thomas Godolphin.

"Yes, they turned me back," she resumed, swaying herself with a bent head, as before. "They wouldn't give me as much as a bit o' mouldy bread. I wasn't going home without taking something to my famished children, and I wasn't a-going to beg like a common tramp; so I just sat myself down here, and I shan't care if I'm found stark and stiff in the morning!"

"Get up! get up!" said Thomas Godolphin. "I will give you something for bread for your children to-night."

In the midst of his own sorrow he could feel for her,—improvident old sinner though she was, and though he knew her so to be. He coaxed and soothed, and finally prevailed upon her to rise; but she was in a reckless, sullen mood, and it took him a little effort before it was effected. She burst into tears when she thanked him, and turned off in the direction of the pollard cottages.

CHAPTER XIV.

DUST TO DUST.

THE reflection of Mr. Snow's bald head was conspicuous on the surgery-blind: he was standing between the window and the lamp. Thomas Godolphin observed it as he passed. He turned to the surgery-door, which was at the side of the house, opened it, and saw that Mr. Snow was alone.

The surgeon turned his head at the

interruption, put down a glass jar which he held, and grasped his visitor's hand in silence.

"Snow, why did you not write for me?"

Mr. Snow brought down his hand on a pair of tiny scales, causing them to jangle and tinkle. He had been bottling up his anger against Lady Sarah for some days now, and this was the first explosion.

"Because I understood that she had done so. I was present when that poor child asked her to do it. I found her on the floor in Sarah Anne's chamber. On the floor, if you'll believe me,—lying there, because she could not hold her aching head up. My lady had dragged her out of bed in the morning, ill as she was, and forced her to attend as usual upon Sarah Anne. I got it all out of Elizabeth. 'Mamma,' she said, when I pronounced it to be the fever, though she was almost beyond speaking then, 'you will write to Thomas Godolphin.' I never supposed but what my lady did it. Your sister, Miss Godolphin, inquired if you had been written for, and I told her yes."

"Snow," came the next sad words, "could you not have saved her?"

The surgeon shook his head and answered in a quiet tone, looking down at the stopper of a phial, which he had taken up and was turning about listlessly in his fingers.

"Neither care nor skill could save her. I gave her the best I had to give,—as did Dr. Beale. Godolphin,"—raising his quick, dark eyes, flashing then with a peculiar light,—"she was ready to go: let it be your consolation."

Thomas Godolphin made no answer, and there was a pause of silence. Mr. Snow resumed; "As to my lady, the best consolation I wish her is, that she may have her heart wrung with remembrance for years to come! I don't care what people may preach about charity and forgiveness; I do wish it. But she'll be brought to her senses, unless I am mistaken; she has lost her treasure and kept her bane. A

year or two more, and that's what Sarah Anne will be."

"She ought to have written for me."

"She ought to do many things that she does not. She ought to have sent Ethel from the house, as I told her, the instant the disorder appeared in it. Not she. She kept her in her insane selfishness; and now I hope she's satisfied with her work. When alarming symptoms showed themselves in Ethel, on the fourth day of her illness I think it was, I said to my lady, 'It is strange what can be keeping Mr. Godolphin!' 'Oh,' said she, 'I did not write for him!' 'Not write!' I answered; and I fear I used an ugly word to my lady's face. 'I'll write at once,' returned she humbly. 'Of course,' cried I, 'when the steed's stolen we shut the stable-door.' It's the way of the world."

Another pause. "I would have given any thing to take Ethel from the house at the time,—to take her from the town," observed Thomas Godolphin, in a low tone. "I said so then. But it could not be."

"I should have done it in your place," said Mr. Snow. "If my lady had said No, I'd have carried her off in the face of it. Not married, you say? Rubbish to that! Everybody knows she'd have been safe with you. And you would have been married as soon as was convenient. What are forms and ceremonies, and carking tongues, in comparison with a girl's life,—a life precious as was Ethel's?"

Thomas Godolphin leaned his forehead in his hand, lost in the retrospect. Oh, that he *had* taken her! that he had set at naught what he had then bowed to, the *convenances* of society! She might have been by his side now, in health and life, to bless him! Doubting words interrupted the train of thought.

"And yet I don't know," the surgeon was repeating in a dreamy manner. "What is to be, will be. We look back, all of us, and say, 'If I had acted thus, if I had done the other, so-and-so would not have happened,—

events would have turned out differently.' But who is to be sure of it? Had you conveyed Ethel out of harm's way,—as we might have thought it,—there's no telling but she'd have had the fever just the same: her blood might have become tainted before she left the house. There's no knowing, Mr. Godolphin."

"True. Good-evening, Snow."

He turned suddenly and hastily to the outer door, but the surgeon caught him up ere he passed its threshold, and touched his arm to detain him. They stood there in the obscurity, their faces shaded in the dusky night.

"She left you a parting word, Mr. Godolphin."

"Ah?"

"An hour before she died she was calm and sensible, though fearfully weak. Lady Sarah had gone to her favorite, and I was alone with Ethel. 'Has he not come yet?' she asked me, opening her eyes. 'My dear,' I said, 'he could not come; he was never written for.' For I knew she alluded to you, and was determined to tell her the truth, dying though she was. 'What shall I say to him for you?' I continued. She put up her hand to motion my face nearer hers, for her voice was growing faint. 'Tell him, with my dear love, not to grieve,' she whispered between her panting breath. 'Tell him that I am but gone on before.' I think they were almost the last words she spoke."

Thomas Godolphin leaned against the modest post of the surgery-entrance, and drank in the words. Then he wrung the doctor's hand, and departed,—hurrying along the street like one who shrank from observation; for he did not care, just then, to encounter the gaze of his fellow-men.

Coming with a quick step up the side street, in which the entrance to the surgery was situated, was the Reverend Mr. Hastings. He stopped to accost the surgeon.

"Was that Mr. Godolphin?"

"Ay. This is a blow for him."

Mr. Hastings's voice insensibly sank to a whisper. "Maria tells me that

he did not know of Ethel's death or illness. Until they arrived here to-night, they thought it was Sarah Anne who died. He went up to Lady Sarah's after the train came in, thinking so."

"Lady Sarah's a fool," was the complimentary rejoinder of Mr. Snow.

"She is in some things," warmly assented the rector. "The telegraphic message she despatched to Scotland, telling of the death, was so obscurely worded as to cause them to assume that it alluded to Sarah Anne."

"Ah well! she's only heaping burdens upon her conscience," rejoined Mr. Snow, in a philosophic tone. "She has lost Ethel through want of care (as I firmly believe) in not keeping her out of the way of infection; she prevented their last meeting through not writing to him; she——"

"He could not have saved her, had he been here," interrupted Mr. Hastings.

"Nobody said he could. There would have been satisfaction in it for him, though. And for her, too, poor child."

Mr. Hastings did not contest the point. He was so very practical a man (in contradistinction to an imaginative one) that he saw little use in "last" interviews, unless they were made productive of actual good. He was disposed to regard such as bordering on the sentimental.

"I have been down to Whinnet's," he remarked. "They sent to the rectory, while I was gone to the station to meet Maria. That raw footboy of theirs came, saying, 'She'd not live through the night, and wanted the parson.' I had a great mind to send word back that if she was in want of the parson, she should have seen him before."

"She's as likely to live through this night as she has been any night for the last six months," said Mr. Snow. "Not a day, since then, but she has been, as may be said, dying."

"And never to awaken to a thought that it might be desirable to make ready

for the journey until the twelfth hour!" exclaimed Mr. Hastings. "When I have a convenient season I will call for thee!" If I have been to the Whinnet's once latterly, I have been ten times, and never could get to see her. Why don't these indifferent people turn Papists?"

Mr. Snow did not detect the point of the remark. "That they may be cured by a modern miracle?" asked he,—which caused the rector of All Souls' to give a short, petulant stamp on the flags with the heel of his shoe.

"I say that they wilfully put off all thought of death until the twelfth hour. And then they send for me, or for one of my brethren, and expect that an hour's devotion will ensure their entrance into heaven. Let such go to the Vicar of Rome for the keys," he cynically added. "I don't keep them."

"Did Mrs. Whinnet send for you herself? or did the household?" inquired Mr. Snow.

"She, I expect: she was dressed for the occasion," replied the clergyman, more cynically than before. "She wore white gloves, and had a few diamond rings drawn on over their fingers! Will she live long?"

"It is uncertain. She may last for six months longer: or she may go next week. It will be sudden when it does come. Have you heard that Bond is dead?"

"I should think I have!" said the rector. "His mother went up to the workhouse this evening, and pretty nearly turned the place inside out with her abuse. She said he had died of starvation, and they had killed him, through not affording out-door relief. Paxton met me and told me about it, as I was walking to the station. 'Is it true that he has died from want of food?' asked Paxton of me. I think he was getting a little alarmed, you see, Snow, lest he should be hauled over by the board and brought in responsible. 'Nonsense,' said I, 'he has died of the fever,' which sent Paxton away contented."

"You are both wrong," rejoined

Mr. Snow. "John Bond died neither of the fever nor of want of food: but from the effects of his irregular life. He got well of the fever; but his constitution was shattered, and could not carry him through the debility that the fever left. His sins took him to the grave. As to starvation,—they held a carouse in the house only last Sunday. You wise gentlemen should not have made them a present of quite so much money all at once," nodded Mr. Snow.

The rector spoke up impulsively, as if the subject angered him. "I washed my hands of it,—I washed my hands of it at the time! I told them it was a senseless thing to do: but I was not listened to. It's not possible to beat provident habits into such as the Bonds. Give them a five-pound note, and it is flung away in so many hours. They'll live as they always have lived: tope and stuff one day, and starve the next."

He turned away as he spoke, and walked home at a brisk pace. Maria was alone when he entered. Mrs. Hastings and Grace were out of the room, talking to some late applicant: a clergyman's house, like a parish apothecary's, is never free long together. Divested of her traveling cloaks, and seated before the fire in her quiet, merino dress, Maria looked as much at home as if she had never quitted it. The blaze, flickering on her face, betrayed to the keen glance of the rector that her eyelashes were wet.

"Grieving after Broomhead already, Maria?" asked he, his tone a stern one.

"Oh, papa, no! I am glad to be at home. I was thinking of poor Ethel."

"She is better off. The time may come, Maria,—we none of us know what is before us,—when some of you young ones who are left may wish you had died as she has. Many a one, battling for very existence with the world's carking cares, wails out a vain wish that he had been taken early from the evil to come."

"It must be so dreadful for Thomas

Godolphin!" Maria resumed, looking straight into the fire, and speaking as if in commune with herself, more than to her father.

"Thomas Godolphin must find another love."

It was one of those phrases, spoken in satire only, to which the rector of All Souls' was occasionally given. He saw so much to condemn in the world—things which grated harshly on his superior mind—that his speech had become imbued with a touch of gall, and he would often give utterance to cynical remarks not at the moment called for.

Maria took the words literally. She turned to Mr. Hastings; her cheek flushed, her hands clasped,—altogether betraying vivid emotion. "Oh, papa, another love! You should not say it of Thomas Godolphin. Love such as his is not for a week or a year: it is for all time."

The rector paused a moment in his reply. His penetrating gaze was fixed upon his daughter. "May I inquire whence you have derived your knowledge of 'love,' Miss Maria Hastings?"

Her eyes drooped, her face turned crimson, her manner grew confused. She turned her countenance from that of her father, and stammered forth some lame excuse. "Everybody knows, papa, that Thomas Godolphin was fond of Ethel."

"Possibly. But everybody does not know that Maria Hastings deems herself qualified to descant upon the subject," was the reply of the rector. And Maria shrank into silence.

There came a day, not many days afterwards, when Maria Hastings, her sisters, and two of her brothers, were gathered in sombre silence around the study-window. The room was built out at the back of the house, over the kitchen, and its side window commanded a full view of the churchyard of All Souls', and of the church-porch,—the only window in the house which did command the uninterrupted view. It was known to the public that nothing displeased the Reverend Mr. Hastings more than for irreverent idlers

to come into the churchyard, staring and gaping and whispering their comments, while he was performing the service of the burial of the dead. And his wishes were generally respected, the mob contenting themselves with collecting in a dense body before the entrance-gates,—those who were lucky enough to get near pushing their noses through the bars. Not a few noses would bear afterwards the marks of the beadle's staff. It was that functionary's custom to plant himself withinside the gate, staff in hand, his back to the mob, and his face to the ceremony: when, by a dexterous back-handed trick, which the beadle had become expert in, down would come the staff upon the array of noses, in the most inopportune and unexpected manner. This had once been productive of what the beadle called a row, and the mob were conveyed off-hand before the sitting magistrates. The result was, that fourteen rebels were condemned to four-and-twenty hours solitary confinement, and the beadle, his cocked hat, and his staff, reigned triumphant evermore.

But on this day that we are speaking of the churchyard was not left quite so free as ordinarily, and stragglers took up their stations within it, defying the beadle. Mr. Hastings's family stole into the room alluded to. Grace, who constituted herself mistress of the others a vast deal more than Mrs. Hastings herself did, allowed the blind to be drawn up about two inches at the bottom of the panes; and Maria, Isaac, Harry, and Rose, kneeling down for convenience sake, brought their faces into contact with it, as the mob outside the churchyard gate did there. Human nature is the same everywhere,—whether in the carefully-trained children of a Christian gentleman, or in those who know no training but what the streets give.

The funeral, even now, was inside the church: it had been inside so long that those eager watchers, estimating time by their impatience, began to think it was never coming out. A sudden movement in the church-porch

reassured them. "Grace," said Maria below her breath, "it is coming now." And Grace knelt down and made one with the rest. Grace had to stoop her head uncomfortably as they did. But they dared not have the blind higher, lest Mr. Hastings should detect them at the window; or, worse still, Thomas Godolphin.

Slowly—slowly—on it came. The Reverend Mr. Hastings first in his white robes; the coffin next; Thomas Godolphin last, with a stranger by his side. Nothing more, save some pall-bearers in their white scarfs and the necessary attendants. It was a perfectly simple funeral, according well with what the dead had been in her simple life.

The sight of this stranger took the curious gazers by surprise. Who was he? A spare, gentlemanly man, past the middle age, with a red nose and an unmistakable wig on his head. The rumors circulating in Prior's Ash had been that Thomas Godolphin would be the sole mourner. Lady Sarah Grame's relatives—and she could not boast of many—lived far north of Aberdeen. "Who can he be?" murmured Grace Hastings.

"Why don't you girls know? That's through your having stuck yourselves in the house all the morning for fear you should lose the funeral. If you had gone out you'd have heard who he is." The retort came from Harry Hastings. Let it be a funeral or a wedding that may be taking place under their very sight, boys must be boys all the world over. And so they ever will be.

"Who is he, then?" asked Grace.

"He is Ethel's uncle," answered Harry. "He arrived by the train this morning. The Earl of Macsomething."

"The Earl of Macsomething?" repeated Grace.

Harry nodded. "Mac begins the name, and I forget the rest. Lady Sarah was his sister."

"Is, you mean," said Grace. "It must be Lord Macdoune."

The church-porch was opposite the study-window. The grave had been

ding in a line with the two, much nearer the window than the church,—in fact, nearly underneath the hedge of the burial-ground. On it came, crossing the broad churchyard path which wound round to the road, crossing over patches of grass, treading between mounds and graves. The clergyman took his place at the head, the mourners near him, the rest disposing themselves decently around.

“Grace,” whispered Isaac, “if we had the window open an inch we should hear.” And Grace was pleased to accord her sanction, and they silently raised it.

“Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery. He cometh up and is cut down like a flower; he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay.”

The children—indeed they were but little more—hushed their breath and listened, and looked at Thomas Godolphin. Thomas Godolphin stood there,—his head bowed, his face still, the gentle wind stirring his thin, dark hair. It was probably a marvel to himself, in after-life, how he had contrived, in that closing hour, to retain his calmness before the world.

“The coffin’s lowered at last!” broke out Harry, who had been more curious to watch the movements of the men than the aspect of Thomas Godolphin.

“Hush, sir!” sharply rebuked Grace. And the minister’s voice again stole over the silence.

“Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God of his great mercy to take unto himself the soul of our dear sister here departed, we therefore commit her body to the ground; earth to earth . . . ashes to ashes . . . dust to dust . . . in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body, that it may be like unto his glorious body, according to the mighty working, whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself.”

Every word came home to Thomas Godolphin’s senses; every syllable vi-

brated upon his heartstrings. That sure and certain hope laid hold of his soul never again to quit it. It diffused its own holy peace and calm in his troubled mind; and never until that moment had he fully realized the worth, the truth, of her dying legacy: “Tell him that I am but gone on before.” A few years,—God, now present with him, alone knew how few or how many,—and Thomas Godolphin would have joined her in eternal life.

But why had Mr. Hastings come to a temporary pause? Because his eyes had fallen upon one then gliding up from the entrance of the churchyard to take his place amidst the mourners,—one who had evidently arrived in a hurry. He wore neither scarf nor hatband, neither cloak nor hood,—nothing but a full suit of plain black clothes.

“Look, Maria!” whispered Grace.

It was George Godolphin. He fell quietly in below his brother, his hat carried in his hand, his head bowed, his fair curls waving in the breeze. It was all the work of an instant; and the minister resumed:

“I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, From henceforth blessed are the dead which die in the Lord; even so saith the Spirit; for they rest from their labors.”

And so went on the service to the end.

The beadle, with much bustle and a liberal use of his staff, scattered and dispersed the mob from the gates, so as to clear a passage. Two mourning coaches were in waiting. Thomas Godolphin came forth, leaning on his brother’s arm, both of them bare-headed still. They entered one; Lord Macdoune stepped into the other. The Rev. Mr. Hastings passed through his private gate to his own garden; and half a dozen men were shovelling in earth upon the coffin as fast as they could shovel it, sending it with a rattle on the bright plate which told who was mouldering within:

“ETHEL GRAME. Aged twenty years.”

CHAPTER XV.

A MIDNIGHT WALK.

"THOMAS!" cried George Godolphin, leaning forward and seizing his brother's hand impulsively, as the mourning-coach paced slowly on, "I should have been here in good time, but for a delay in the train."

"How did you hear of it? I did not know where to write to you," calmly asked Thomas.

"I heard of it at Broomhead. I went back there, and then I came off at once. Thomas, could they not save her?"

A slight negative movement was all Thomas Godolphin's answer. "How did you find your father, George?"

"Breaking, breaking fast. Thomas, all his talk is, that he must come home to die."

"To Ashlydyat. I know. How is he to come to it? The Folly is not Ashlydyat. He has desired me to see that he is at Prior's Ash before Christmas, and I shall do so."

George looked surprised. "Desired you to see that he is?"

"If he is not back speedily, I am to go to Broomhead."

"Oh, I see. That your authority, upholding his, may be pitted against my lady's. Take care, Thomas; she may prove stronger than both of you put together."

Thomas Godolphin sat in his place at the bank, opening the morning letters. It was some days subsequent to the interment of Ethel Grame, and the second week of December was already on the wane. In two days more it was his intention to start for Broomhead: for no tidings arrived of the return of Sir George. The very last of the letters he came upon was one bearing the Scotch post-mark,—a little, poor note with a scrawled address: no wonder the sorting clerk had placed it underneath! It looked very obscure in comparison with those large blue letters and their business hands.

Thomas Godolphin knew the writing. It was Margery's; and we may

as well read the contents with him *verbatim*:

"MR. THOMAS, SIR,—I imbrace this favurable oportunaty of adresing you for I considur it my duty to take up my pen and inform you about my master, *He's not long for this world*, Mr. Thomas I know it by good tokens which I don't write not being a easy writer but they are none the less true, The master's fretting his life away because he is not at home and she is a keeping him because she's timorus of the fever, But you saw how it was sir when you was here and it's the same story still, There'd have been a fight for it with my lady but if I'd been you Mr. Thomas I'd have took him also when me and the young ladies went with you to Prior's Ash, When I got back here, sir I see a awful change in him and Mr. George he see it but my lady didn't, I pen these here lines sir to say you had better come off at once and not wait for it to be nearer Christmas, The poor master he's always saying *Thomas is coming for me Thomas is coming for me* but I'd not answer for it now that he will ever get back alive, Sir it was the worst day's work he ever did to go away at all from Ashlydyat if my lady was dying to live at the new Folly place she might have went to it but not him, When we do a foolish wrong thing we don't think of the consekenses at the time at least not much of 'em but we think all the more after and fret our hearts out with blame and it have been slowly killing him ever since, I am vexed to disturb you Mr. Thomas with this epistle for I know you must be in enough grief of your own just now,

Your humble servant

"MARGERY."

Thomas Godolphin read it over twice, and then crossed to the other side of the private room, where sat a gentleman at another desk. A tall, portly man, with a fresh color, large, keen dark eyes, and hair white as snow. It was Mr. Crosse.

"Any thing particular, Thomas?"

he asked, as Thomas Godolphin put the letter in his hand.

"Not in business. Read it, will you?"

Mr Crosse read the letter through. "Is it my advice you wish for?" asked he, when he came to the last word.

"Not exactly," replied Thomas Godolphin. "I have made up my mind, I believe."

"To go immediately?"

"Yes. Within an hour."

"Right. It is what I should have recommended you to do, had you been undecided. When it comes to letter-writing with Margery, the thing is serious, rely upon it."

Thomas Godolphin returned to his own place, gave some twenty minutes to business, and then passed into the sitting-room. Janet and Bessy were alone in it. Janet was looking over her housekeeping accounts,—never a more exact controller than she,—Bessy was indulging herself with a look at the morning's paper.

"Janet, I am going to Broomhead."

Janet, who had been adding up some figures, marked down the sum total, before she turned to her brother. "Have you had news? Not another dispatch!"

"I have had a letter from Margery," said Thomas, sitting down for an instant near the table, and producing the letter. "I shall start at once, Janet, and not wait for Saturday."

The remarks of the two sisters on the letter were very different. "He never *will* reach home alive," said Janet, in a low tone, in acquiescence with the one remark which, of all the rest, took most hold upon her.

"Thomas, go you, and bring him straight off at once," said practical Bessy. "If papa has this strong wish to be back, it is not to be tolerated that he must give it up to the whims of my lady. Never was such a thing heard of in these enlightened days, as for a man to be under petticoat government to that extent. As good constitute him a prisoner at once. If he desires to return to the

Folly, he shall return. We know that in illness there's no place like home.

Janet shook her head. "He cannot come *home*, Bessy. Ashlydyat is his home; not the Folly."

"At any rate, he will be closer to it at the Folly than he is at Broomhead," was Bessy's answer.

The railway-station nearest to Broomhead, was three miles distant from it, road-way: but there was a shorter cut across some fields—bearing past the house of that Mr. Sandy Bray, if you are curious to know—which reduced it to less than two. It was one of those rural stations so little frequented, that travelers were tempted to ask why it was built. Such a thing as a fly, for hire, or an omnibus, had never yet been seen at it at mid-day: you may therefore judge what chance Thomas Godolphin had of either, getting there, as he did, at midnight. He was the only passenger to descend, and the train went shrieking on. The man, who lived in the one-roomed cottage close by, and was called the station-master, appeared to be the only official to receive him,—a man who had been drafted thither from one of the English lines.

"For Broomhead, sir?" he questioned, recognizing the traveler.

"Yes. Do you happen to know how Sir George Godolphin is?"

"He looks rare and poorly, sir. He was past here in his carriage to pay. Huddled up in a corner of it, as if he was cold, or else hadn't got the strength to sit up. Her ladyship was inside with him."

"There's no porter about, I suppose?"

"He has been gone this two hours, sir. I'd offer to carry your luggage myself, but I shall have the up express by in half an hour. I shut up for the night then."

"I would not trouble you for so trifling a matter, were you at liberty, at this hour," replied Thomas Godolphin.

He took up his portmanteau him-

self,—a small thing not much larger than what the French would call a *petit sac-de-nuit*, containing little besides a clean shirt and his shaving tackle,—and started, bending his steps not along the road, but across it to the stile.

"I'd not take the field way to-night, sir, if I were you," said the man from the station-door. "The road is the safest."

"Why is it?" asked Thomas Godolphin.

"There's a nasty bit, the field way, a quarter of a mile afore you come to Bray's. Anybody, not knowing it well, might take the wrong turning, and go, head-first, into the dam."

"But I do know it well," said Thomas Godolphin. "And the night is light enough for me to distinguish the turnings."

The station-master looked up at the skies,—if that's not speaking figuratively, for he could see nothing but fog: a light, hazy mist—not a dark one—which seemed likely to turn to rain. He said no more, save a good-night, sir, and Thomas Godolphin walked on, hesitating for a moment between the two roads, and then turning decisively to that of the fields, as if some hidden impulse impelled him. Perhaps it did.

It was not a pleasant night, a pleasant time, or a pleasant way: and Thomas Godolphin, as he sped on, began to think he should have done well to telegraph his intended journey from Prior's Ash to Broomhead, that they might have sent a conveyance to await him at the station. Regrets were of no use now, and he trudged along, taking two steps forward and slipping one back, for the ground in places was wet and slippery. It was a peculiar night. There was no moon; there were no stars; no skies in fact to be seen at all, as you have heard; and yet the night was light. The haze itself seemed to cast a light: it was not near the earth, not surrounding Thomas Godolphin; but appeared to be far away, like a gauzy

curtain shrouding the heavens and the horizon.

What were Thomas Godolphin's thoughts bent upon? Need you ask? For some time to come, days and weeks and months, they must run chiefly on her who had left him. He remembered his last arrival at Broomhead: he remembered his thoughts as he had walked from the station like he was doing now; though then it had been by daylight. His thoughts had been of Ethel, and his coming marriage; his thoughts had been of that farewell kiss which she had pressed upon his lips. Now—now he must only think of her as one of heaven's angels.

He lifted his hat to wipe his brow, and then changed his load to the other hand. He was coming to the dam now. He could hear its waters. Go carefully, Thomas Godolphin! A few steps down that dark turning, and you might never be heard of more. But he knew the way, and the night was light, and he bore on his proper course, and the dangerous turn was passed.

A little way farther on, and he could discern the outline of Bray's cottage in the distance. A light burnt in one of the windows, and he wondered who was ill. Probably Margery's sister. It was a diversion to his own sad reflections. Next he became absorbed in thoughts of his father. How should he find him? Ideas, we all know, assume the coloring of surrounding associations, and Thomas Godolphin, in that solitary midnight hour, grew to take a more sombre view of the news contained in Margery's letter than he had hitherto done. It is wonderful how circumstances affect us! In the broad light of day, walking, for instance, as he had done previously to Broomhead, apprehensions would not have come over him. Now he pictured his father (by no will of his own: the scenes rose up uncalled) as lying ill, perhaps dying. Perhaps even then a telegraphic message to him might be

on its road to Prior's Ash! Perhaps—

A shrill scream right over his head, and Thomas Godolphin positively started. It proceeded from some night-bird that had dived down upon him and now flew onwards, flapping its wings. That superstitious Margery would have called it an evil omen.

Thomas Godolphin followed it with his eyes, speculating upon what bird it could be. It looked like a seagull; had screamed like one: but the sea was far off, and, if it was one, it must have come a long distance.

Back it came again, and dived down as before,—seemed to dive down close upon his head, like those ugly leather-winged bats will do. Thomas Godolphin did not like it, and he wished the portmanteau in his hand had been a gun. "Nasty screaming things!" he ejaculated. "I wonder what good these restless night-birds do, save disturb from sleep any worn-out mortal, who may be within hearing?"

Scenes of the recent past rose up before him,—the dark sombre scenes in which he had been an actor. The ominous Shadow of Ashlydyat, striking on his sight as he turned the ash-trees, the night of his previous summons to Broomhead: the dead face of Ethel lying on her bed: the reminiscence of the funeral scene; of his walking away from it with the dull sound of the earth falling on her coffin smiting his ears,—none of them pleasant things to recall at that particular hour. Why should they have come to him?

"What business had they there at such a time?"

Drive them away, he could not. But neither did he try. They served to make doubly sad, doubly ominous, his new fears for his father. He knew how precarious was Sir George's life. What if he were then dying! Nay, what if it were the very moment of his departure?—if he were dead? having called upon his children, upon him, Thomas, in vain?

That odious bird once more! It

flew over his head with a shriek shriller than the last. Thomas Godolphin was at that moment within a few paces of a stile which lay in his path. He turned his head round to look after the bird, not slackening his pace, putting out his hand before him to save himself from knocking violently again the stile. The hand came in contact with the stile, and Thomas let it rest momentarily; his head was turned still, watching the bird, which was then flying round and round, making fierce circlets in the air.

But he could not stop there all night, staring at the bird, and he turned sharply round to cross the stile. Placing one foot on its lower rail, he—

What made Thomas Godolphin start back as if he had been shot? Who and what was that, standing on the other side of the stile fixedly gazing at him? A tall, shadowy, upright form, all dark, bearing the unmistakable features of Sir George Godolphin.

Will you—you strong, practical, unimaginative men of the world—forgive Thomas Godolphin if in that one brief moment the wild superstitions instilled into his mind in childhood were allowed their play? Forgive him, or not, it was the fact. In imagination, but the instant before, he had seen his father lying upon his bed, the soul parting from the body: and Thomas Godolphin as much believed what he now saw before him was his father's spirit, as that he himself was in existence,—the spirit appearing to him in the moment of its departure. His flesh turned cold, and the drops gathered on his brow.

"My son, can it be you?"

Thomas Godolphin came out of his folly, and grasped his father. That it was real flesh and blood which yielded to his arms, he now knew: but perhaps the *surprise* that it should be so, was even greater than the other emotion. Sir George Godolphin there! at that midnight hour! nearly a mile from his home! and bareheaded! Was it really Sir George? Thomas Go-

dolphin rubbed his eyes and thought he himself must have taken leave of his senses.

"My father, my dear father, what are you doing here?"

"I thought I'd go to the station, Thomas, and see about a special train. I must go to Ashlydyat to die."

Thomas got over the stile. The tone, the manner, the words altogether had betrayed to him an unhappy fact,—that his father's mind was not in a state of perfect sanity. He trembled for his health, too. It was a cold raw night, sloppy under foot in places, and here was Sir George in his black evening costume, his white waistcoat, without so much as an overcoat thrown on,—he, who had only been out since the last fainting-fit in a close carriage, and then, well wrapped up.

"Where is your hat, father?"

The old knight lifted his hand to his head and felt it, as if he had not known that his hat was away. "I must have come out without it, Thomas," he said. "What was that noise over there?" he continued, pointing above the stile to the way Thomas had come, his frame shaking all over with cold, as he spoke.

"I think it was a seagull. Or some screeching night-bird."

"I could not get over the stile, Thomas. The walk seemed to have taken the strength out of me. How did you come here? I thought you were at Prior's Ash."

Thomas Godolphin was busy. He had taken off his greatcoat, and was putting it on his father, buttoning it up carefully. A less man in size than Sir George, it did not fit very well: but Sir George had shrunk. The hat fitted better.

"But you have not got a hat yourself!" said Sir George, surveying his son's head, when he had submitted in patient silence to the dressing.

"I don't want one," replied Thomas. "The night-air will not hurt me." Nevertheless, all the way to Broom-

head, he was looking on either side, if perchance he might come upon Sir George's, lying in the road.

Thomas drew his father close, to support him on his arm, and they commenced their walk to the house. Not until then did Thomas know how very weak his father was. Stooping, shivering, tripping with every other step, it appeared impossible that he could walk back: the wonder was, how he had walked there.

Thomas Godolphin halted in dismay. How was he to get his father home? Carry him, he could not: it was beyond his physical strength. The light in Bray's window suggested a thought to him.

"Father, I think you had better go to Bray's, and stay there while I send for your hand-chair. You are not able to walk."

"I won't go to Bray's," returned the knight, with a touch of fiery vehemence. "I don't like Bray, and I will not put my foot inside his threshold. Besides it's late, and my lady will miss us."

He pressed on somewhat better towards home, and Thomas Godolphin saw nothing else that could be done save to press with him and give him all the help in his power. "My dear father, you should have waited until the morning," he said, "and have gone out then."

"But I wanted to see about a train. Thomas," remonstrated the knight. "And I can't do it in the day. She will not let me. When we drive past the railway-station, she won't get out, and won't let me. Thomas, I want to go back to Ashlydyat."

"I have come to take you back, my dear father."

"Ay, ay. And mind you are firm when she says I must not go because of the fever. The fever will not hurt me, Thomas. I can't be firm. I am grown feeble, and people take my will from me. You are my first-born son, Thomas."

"Yes."

"Then you must be firm for me, I say."

"I will be, father."

"This is a rough road, Thomas!"

"No: it is smooth: and I am glad that it is. But you are tired."

The old knight bent his head as if picking his steps. Presently he lifted it again:

"Thomas, when do they quit Ashlydyat?"

"Who, sir? The Verralls? They have not had notice yet."

Sir George stopped. He drew up his head to his full height, and turned it on his son. "Not had notice? When, then, do I go back? I won't go to Lady Godolphin's Folly. I must go to Ashlydyat."

"Yes, sir," said Thomas, soothingly. "I will see about it."

The knight, satisfied, resumed his walk. "Of course you will see about it. You are my son and heir, Thomas. I depend upon you."

They pursued their way for some little time in silence, and then Sir George spoke again, his tone a hushed one. "Thomas, I have put on mourning for her. I mourn her as much as you do. And you did not get there in time to see her alive!"

"Not in time. "No," replied Thomas, looking hard into the mist overhead.

"I'd have come to the funeral, Thomas, if she had let me. But she was afraid of the fever. George got there in time for it?"

"Barely."

"When he came back to Broomhead and heard of it, he was so cut up, poor fellow. Cut up for your sake, Thomas. He said he should be in time to follow her to the grave if he started at once, and he went off then. Thomas"—dropping his voice still lower,— "whom shall you take to Ashlydyat now?"

"My sisters."

"Nay. But as your wife? You will be replacing Ethel sometime."

"I shall never marry now, father."

At length Broomhead was reached. Thomas held open the gate of the shrubbery for his father, and guided him through it.

"Shall we have two engines, Thomas?"

"Two engines, sir! What for?"

"They'd take us quicker, you know. This is not the station!" broke forth Sir George, in a sharp, wailing tone of complaint as they emerged beyond the shrubbery, and the house stood in face of them. "Oh, Thomas, you said you were taking me to Ashlydyat! I cannot die away from it!"

Thomas Godolphin stood nearly confounded. His father's discourse—the greater part of it at any rate—had been so rational, that he had begun to hope he was mistaken as to his weakness of mind. "My dear father, be at rest," he said: "we will start, if you like, with morning light. But to go now to the station would not forward us: it is by this time closed for the night."

They found the house in a state of commotion. Sir George had been missed, and servants were out searching for him. Lady Godolphin regarded Thomas with all the eyes she possessed,—thunderstruck at his appearance there and then. "What miracle brought you here?" she uttered.

"No miracle, Lady Godolphin. I am thankful that I happened to come. What might have become of Sir George without me I know not. I expect he would have remained at the stile where I found him till morning, and might have caught his death."

"He will catch that speedily if he is to decamp out of the house at midnight in this mad manner," peevishly rejoined my lady.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LAST JOURNEY.

"I BEG your pardon, Lady Godolphin. That is not the question."

"Not the question!" reiterated Lady Godolphin. "I say that it is the question. The question is whether Sir

George is better and safer here than he would be at Prior's Ash. And of course he is so."

"I think not," replied Thomas Godolphin, quietly. "He would be equally well at Prior's Ash,—equally safe, as I believe and trust. And the anxiety to be there which has taken hold of his mind has grown too strong to be repressed. The detaining him here against his wish would make him ill, Lady Godolphin,—not the return to his home."

"Prior's Ash is an unhealthy place just now."

"It's unhealthiness has passed. The last to be attacked was—was Ethel. And you are aware that the time since then may be counted by weeks."

"Sir George is partially childish," pursued Lady Godolphin. "You may see for yourself that he is. It would be most unreasonable, it would be ridiculous to take notice of his whims. Look at his starting out of the house to-night with nothing on, and roaming a mile or two away in the dark! Is that a proof of sanity?"

"It is a proof how fixedly his mind is bent upon returning home," replied Thomas Godolphin. "He was endeavoring, as I have already informed you, Lady Godolphin, to make his way to the railway-station."

"I shall have him watched in future," said she.

"Lady Godolphin," he resumed, speaking in the calmly quiet tone which characterized him,—unmistakably firm now in the midst of its court-ousness,—"I am here by the desire of my father to accompany him back to Prior's Ash,—I may almost say to convey him back: for I fear he can no longer boast much power of his own in any way. The last words I said to him before entering were that he should start, if it pleased him, with morning light. I must keep my promise."

"Do you defy me, Thomas Godolphin?"

"I have no wish to do so. I have no wish to abate a particle of the respect and consideration due to you as

my father's wife. At the same time, my duty to him is paramount: I hold it more sacred, Lady Godolphin, than any earthly thing. He has charged me, by my duty, to see him back to Ashly—to Prior's Ash: and I shall do so."

"You would see him back, I suppose, if Prior's Ash were full of snakes and scorpions?" returned my lady, somewhat losing her temper.

"It is full of neither. Nothing is there, so far as I am aware, that can harm Sir George. Can you urge a single good reason why he should not return to it, Lady Godolphin?"

The delicate bloom on my lady's cheeks was surely heightened,—or did Thomas Godolphin fancy it? "But what if I say he shall *not* return?" she asked, her voice slightly raised.

"I think you will not say it, Lady Godolphin," he replied. "It is Sir George's wish to go to Prior's Ash, and it is my province to see that wish carried out,—as he has requested me. Much as I desire to respect your feelings and any plans you may have formed, they cannot weigh with me in this case. There is no necessity whatever for your returning home, Lady Godolphin, unless you choose to do so; but Sir George will leave for it to-morrow."

"And you boast that you do not defy me!" uttered Lady Godolphin, with a short laugh. "I would use force to keep him in this house rather than he should go out of it against my will."

"Force?" repeated Thomas Godolphin, looking at her for an explanation. "What sort of force?"

"Physical force," she answered, putting on a degree of fair suavity. "I would command the servants to bar his egress."

A faint smile crossed Thomas Godolphin's lips. "Do not try that, Lady Godolphin," he replied in the respectful manner of one who tenders earnest advice. "I should be sorry indeed to oppose publicly my authority to yours. You know the servants have, most of them, grown old in our service,—and

that may be their excuse; but there is not one of them but would be obedient to the lifting of my finger in the cause of their master."

Lady Godolphin was foiled. Lady Godolphin had been long aware that she should be foiled if it ever came to an encounter—strength against strength—between her and Thomas Godolphin. Easy George she could manage, the Miss Godolphins she could put down, Sir George was now as a very reed in her hands. But Thomas?—he was different. None of them had been so uniformly respectful and courteous to her as Thomas: and yet she had known that he, of all the rest, would not bend to her authority were any cause to arrive why he should not.

She sat biting—as far as she dared—her rose-tinted lips; she lifted one hand and toyed with her perfumed ringlets; she opened a fan which lay at her side and gently fanned herself; she glanced at the still countenance of Thomas Godolphin and knew that she must give up the game. To give it up with a good grace was essential to her future rule, and that she was now making up her mind to do. It would never do either for her to stand in the hall on the morrow morning, call the servants around her and say, "It is my pleasure that Sir George does not leave this place for Prior's Ash: keep him in. Hold him in; lock the door; use any means necessary,"—while there was Thomas Godolphin at hand to lift—as he had phrased it—his finger and say, "It is my pleasure that my father does go to Prior's Ash. Stand back while he passes." Lady Godolphin was no simpleton, and she could hazard a shrewd guess as to which of the two would be obeyed. So she sat,—bringing her mind to make a virtue of necessity and throw up the plea. In point of fact she had no cause of objection to Sir George's returning to Prior's Ash save that she did not care to return to it herself. For two reasons: one was that she liked Broomhead best; the other, that she could not

subdue yet her fears of the fever. She bent her head as if examining the chaste devices on her fan, and spoke indifferently:

"You must be aware that my wish to keep Sir George here arises solely from the state of Prior's Ash. It always has been our custom to spend Christmas there, amongst you all, and I should have had no other thought for this Christmas, but for the sickness which arose. Will you guarantee that it is safe for him?"

"Nay, Lady Godolphin. To 'guarantee' an assurance of the sort would be impossible at the best of times. I believe that any fears you may entertain now of the fever will prove but a bugbear."

"The fever has not been much of a bugbear to you," she exclaimed, acidity in her tone.

"No," he sadly answered.

He drew his chair from the table, where he had been sitting to take some refreshment after his journey, and at that moment the hall clock struck two.

"I am keeping you up very late, Lady Godolphin."

"It is a pleasant change," she answered. "The life here, with Sir George in his sick state, is so excessively monotonous, that a few nights of sitting up and days of bed, might prove an agreeable variety. Did I understand you rightly,—that you intend to start in the morning?"

"If Sir George shall then wish to do so as anxiously as he appears wish it to-night. Otherwise, I will not object to delay it until the following one. I cannot remain longer: business demands my presence at home. And," he added, dropping his voice, "I fear that speed is necessary for my father's sake. If he does not go pretty soon, he may not be able to go at all. It is more than likely we shall start to-morrow."

"You cannot expect me to be ready in that space of time."

"Certainly not. Just as you please, Lady Godolphin."

Thomas Godolphin was shown to

his room. Margery waylaid him in the corridor and entered it with him. "Did you get my epistle, Mr. Thomas?"

"It was that which brought me here now, Margery. Otherwise, I should not have come until the end of the week."

"Then you would have come too late, sir. Yes, Mr. Thomas, I mean what I say," added the woman, dropping her voice to a solemn tone. "By dreams and signs and tokens, which I have had——"

"Stay, Margery. You know I am never very tolerant of your dreams and signs. Let them rest."

"It's true you are not," answered Margery, without the least appearance of discomfiture, "and many's the argument I would have liked to hold with you over it. But you'd never let me. When you were a young man, you'd laugh and joke it down,—just as Mr. George might now, were I so foolish as to waste such words upon *him*,—and since you got older and steadier you have just put me off as you are doing at this moment. Mr. Thomas, gifts are different. They are not sent upon all alike: and the Scriptures says so. One man'll see what another can't. Isn't one able to play the most beautiful music, and make up the tunes himself so as to keep a whole playhouse on the listen, while another can't tell one tune from another, and couldn't write one if it was to save his neck? Don't one man have a head for steam-engines and telegraphs and put 'em together in it, as if he had got a workshop inside of him; and another, his own cousin, maybe, can't tell a ingen when he sees it,—the gaby!—and couldn't work one out himself if he lived to be a hundred years old? And so with other things."

"Well?" responded Thomas Godolphin,—for Margery came to a pause, as if waiting for an answer.

"And do you suppose, Mr. Thomas, that it's not the same with signs and warnings? It is not given to all to see or understand them. It is not

given, as I take it, for many to see or understand 'em. But it is given to a few: and those few know that it is, and they can no more be talked out of knowing that it's truth, than they can be talked out of their own life, or of the skies above 'em. And, Mr. Thomas, it's not only that those who have not the gift can't see or believe for themselves, but they can't be brought to believe that others may: and so they laugh at and ridicule it. Many a time, sir, you have laughed at me."

"You see so many, you know, Margery," said Thomas Godolphin, with a slight smile.

Margery looked at him. "Sometimes I have thought, sir, that you are not quite as unbelieving as you seem. But I know it does not do for a gentlemen, as is high and edicated and looked up to in his town, to say he puts faith in such. So I'll not trouble you, Mr. Thomas, with the tokens I have had. I'll not tell you that only last night that ever was, I heard the footsteps of——"

"But you are telling me, Margery."

"That's just how you take me up, Mr. Thomas! Well, sir, I say I'll not bring forward them things, but I'll speak of what you may think a surer sign,—and that's Sir George's state of health"

"Ay, come! I can follow you there."

"If ever death was writ in any body's face, it is writ in his. And that's another thing, Mr. Thomas, that everybody can't see,—death in the face. Every goose can see it when it comes, like they can see a table that's afore 'em; but there's not many can see it when it first casts its shadow. Did you ever meet with anybody that was away from his own home, and something came over him,—like a fever, as may be said,—that he must hasten back to it to die?" she abruptly asked.

"Not that I know of," said Thomas Godolphin.

"Then I have, sir," returned Margery. "And I know that it's a sure sign that death's coming, let alone

other tokens. I don't mean just that wish to be back home which anybody may feel in sickness: that's nothing but a sign of their restlessness, or their wish for home friends or home comforts: but when it grows, as I say, into a fever, a disease, a impelling want that can't be put down, which keeps 'em on the rack, a-bed or up, and causes 'em to steal out of their houses in a sort of delirium, believing they're on the road to it, and altogether disorders the brain, then it can't be mistaken. I misdoubt me, Mr. Thomas, whether he'll be got back in time, start as soon as you will. It is not as if he had Ashlydyat to go to: he'd be got back then."

"Why! what difference can it make to his getting back, whether he has Ashlydyat to go to, or Lady Godolphin's Folly?"

Margery shook her head. "If he had Ashlydyat to go to, he'd be spared to reach it. When that strong wish comes upon them for their home, and circumstances work so that they can start, they'll be let reach it. HIM that puts the wish in 'em, won't fail to carry it out. But Sir George have shut it out of his own power to get back to his home. It's not my lady's Folly he's hankering after; it's Ashlydyat. And to Ashlydyat he can't go. I misdoubt me but the struggle will be hard, wherever it comes, whether here or at my lady's Folly: his constant cry is that he *can't die* away from Ashlydyat."

To argue with Margery when she went into what Bessy Godolphin was apt to term her "ghost crotchets," Thomas knew to be perfectly useless. He gave her a gentle hint that he should be glad to be alone and get to bed. Margery was pleased to take it, stopping only to volunteer one or two remarks on her way to the door.

"There'll be a tussle with my lady to get him off."

"I do not suppose there will be," replied Thomas Godolphin.

Margery nodded her head, as if to intimate that she adhered to her own

opinion, and resumed. "When do you start, sir?"

"Probably to-morrow."

That satisfied her; and, wishing Thomas Godolphin good night, she withdrew.

The house was awoke before it was yet dawn. Sir George had rung for his servant, had rung for Margery, had rung for the coachman to say the carriage was wanted,—in short, had rung for so many that the whole household was aroused. My lady came, in furslippers, and a warm dressing-gown, to know what the commotion could mean. His son Thomas was there, the knight answered. He was sure he had not dreamt it, but that Thomas *had* come the previous night; he met him at the stile; and Thomas had promised that they should go to Ashlydyat with morning light.

It appeared he was sane enough to remember that. My lady retired, grumbling; and Margery went and called Thomas.

When Thomas reached the room, Sir George was nearly in the last stage of dressing. His own trembling, eager fingers had done as much towards it as his servant. He lifted his face with its ashy hue, and its strange yearning depicted on it. "Thomas, my son, I must make haste back to Ashlydyat. You said I should go there to die."

"Do you wish to start immediately, father?"

"You said I should!" he wailed in a tone of imploring earnestness. "You said I should start with morning light."

"Yes, yes," acquiesced Thomas. And he forthwith busied himself to hasten the preparations.

The very earliest hour that they could leave the station was a little before nine. No train stopped at it before. This gave time to get off comfortably; though Sir George, in his impatience, could with difficulty be induced to sit down to breakfast. My lady came in when they were at the meal.

"This is really the most extraordi-

nary proceeding!" she exclaimed, speaking chiefly to Thomas Godolphin. "Were such a thing related to me as taking place in another house, I should decline to give credence to it. Are the hours in the day so few that you must choose the dusk of a winter's morning to commence a journey?"

Thomas glanced at Sir George, as if to draw her attention to him. "My father's anxiety will not let him wait, Lady Godolphin. I think it well that we should catch the first train."

"I wash my hands of the journey altogether," said Lady Godolphin. "If Sir George does not get to the other end of it alive, you will have the goodness to remember that *I* am not to blame. Far better that he were safely kept in his room wrapped up in his dressing-gown in front of a good fire."

"In that case, my lady, I'd not answer for it that he got to the end of the day alive," interposed Margery, who was in and out of the room, busier than any of them. "Whether Sir George stays, or whether he goes, he'll not last many days," she added, in a lower tone so that it might not reach her master's ear.

"If I must have gone, I would have started at a Christian hour, Sir George," resumed his wife. "Getting us all out of bed as if we were so many milkmaids!"

Sir George looked round, a trembling timidity in his voice and manner,—did he fear that she would detain him yet? "You can come afterwards, you know, my lady; we need not hurry you. Oh, I must, I must be at Ashlydyat!"

Thomas Godolphin came to the rescue. "We shall be in the carriage in five minutes, my dear father, if you will only eat your breakfast."

And in little more than five minutes they were seated in it on their way to the station, Sir George's own man and Margery attending them. Margery would have deemed it just as possible to cut herself in two, as to be sepa-

rated from her master in his present state.

They did not get him that night to Prior's Ash. Thomas feared the long journey for him without a break; so they halted for the night about midway. Singular to say, Sir George did not utter an impatient word at the delay: from the moment of leaving Broomhead he had been perfectly calm. Whether the fact of his being indisputably on the road had soothed his mind to tranquillity, or whether the strangely eager desire to be home had now left it, certain it was, that he had never mentioned Ashlydyat throughout the day. Of one thing there could be no doubt,—that he was fast sinking,—sinking both in mind and body. Margery grew terrified. "Pray Heaven we may get him home," she uttered.

But if she was terrified at Sir George's state over night, she had more cause to be so in the morning. It really appeared that life was ebbing quietly out of him. "What can we do!" she exclaimed to Thomas Godolphin.

"We must get him home," was the reply.

"Mr. Thomas, as sure as that we are living here, he would have been dead before this, had he stopped at Broomhead!"

In the dusk of the winter evening, Sir George was at length once more at Prior's Ash. Thomas had telegraphed of their arrival, and Janet was at the station in the carriage. But, with the first few words, Janet perceived that he was perfectly childish,—not only childish, but alarmingly changed. Janet grew pale as she turned to Margery.

"Since when?" she murmured.

"Since many days, off and on; but worse since we left Broomhead yesterday morning. He has been sinking hour by hour. Miss Janet, it's death."

They got him to the Folly. And in half an hour the whole of his family were gathered round his death-bed. His partner, Mr. Crosse; the surgeon;

and the rector of All Souls', were also there.

He was rambling for the most part in an unconnected manner; but he recognized them all individually, and occasionally gave utterance to collected, rational remarks, as he might have done had he been in full possession of his senses. He fancied himself at Ashlydyat.

"I could not have died away from it, you know, Crosse," he suddenly cried to that gentleman. "Thomas was for bringing me back to the Folly; but I told him I must go to Ashlydyat. If I did let it to strangers, they could not keep me out of it when I wanted to go there to die. A Godolphin must not die away from Ashlydyat. Where's Cecil?" he added, after a pause.

Poor Cecil, the tears streaming down her cheeks, was close to him,—in his view then. "I am here, papa."

The knight laid his hand upon her arm,—or rather essayed to lay it,—but it fell again. His thoughts seemed to pass to another subject.

"Crosse, I have been telling Thomas that I should not allow more than three per cent. on those deposits. Have you seen Mainwaring lately?"

Mr. Snow stepped forward and administered something in a wine-glass. There appeared to be a difficulty in swallowing, and only part of it was taken. "He grows more restless," said the surgeon, in an undertone.

Sir George's eyes, as he was slightly raised to take the medicine, had fallen upon some object at the other end of the room, and continued to be strained on it. Who has changed the position of the cabinet?" he exclaimed, in a stronger tone than he had yet spoken.

It caused them all to turn and regard the spot. A fine old cabinet of ebony, inlaid with silver, stood opposite the bed,—had stood there ever since they removed to Lady Godolphin's Folly,—transplanted thither from Ashlydyat. In the latter house, it had stood on the right hand of Sir George's bed; and his memory had

evidently gone back to that. There could not be a better proof that he was fancying himself at Ashlydyat, lying in his own chamber.

"Janet! Janet! why have you put the cabinet there?"

Janet Godolphin bent her head soothingly over him. "My dear father, it shall be moved, if you wish it."

The knight looked at her, looked at her inquiringly for a moment, perhaps not recognizing her. Then he feebly essayed to look beyond her, as if her head interposed between his own view and something behind. "Hush, my dear, I am speaking to your mother. I want to know why she changed the place of the cabinet."

"We thought you'd like it there, Sir George, that you could see it best," interposed Margery, who knew better than most of them how to deal with the sick. "I'll get it put back before to-morrow morning."

This satisfied him, and he lay for a few minutes still. They thought he would sleep. Presently his eyes opened again, and they rested on George.

"George, where's Charlotte?"

"Who, sir?" demanded George, somewhat taken aback at the question. "Do you mean Charlotte Pain? She is at—she is not here."

"Are you married yet?"

"Oh no," said George, hastily, while several pairs of wondering eyes were directed towards him,—and those of the Rev. Mr. Hastings were of the number. "Time enough for that, father."

"George," next came the words, in a hollow whisper this time, "don't let her die as Ethel did."

"Not if I can help it," replied George, speaking without any serious meaning, save that of humoring his father.

"And don't let Verrall go off the bargain with the money. He is keen that way; but he has no right to touch Charlotte's. If he does—Bessy, is Jekyl dead?"

"Oh no, papa," said Bessy, suppressing her tears as she caressed her

father's hand: it was in stooping to do this that the knight had observed her. "Jekyl is well and hearty yet; and he asked after you to-day. He heard you were coming home."

"Ay! all well and hearty but me. But it is the will of God to take me, and he knows what is best. Where's Thomas?"

"I am here, father," replied Thomas Godolphin, leaning forward so that his father could see him.

Sir George tried to put up his hand with a beckoning gesture. Thomas understood it; he bent his face close to that pale one, and clasped the nearly inanimate hand in his, listening reverently to the whisper that was breathed so solemnly.

"Thomas, I charge you, never quit Ashlydyat."

"I will not," replied Thomas Godolphin.

"If you bring one home to it, and she would urge you to quit it till you have no will of your own left, do not yield to it. Do not listen to her. Break with her, and let her go forth alone, rather than quit Ashlydyat."

"Father, I will never, of my own free will, quit Ashlydyat. I promise you that, so far as I can hold control over human events, I will live and die in it."

Certainly Sir George understood the promise and its meaning. There could be no mistaking that he did, by the smile of content which from that moment overspread his countenance, lighting up with satisfaction even his dying eye. He lay for a considerable time still, and then suddenly called for Margery.

"You'll tell your mistress that we can't root up those bushes," he said, as she came near. "It's of no use trying. As fast as they are got up from one place they grow in another. They'll not hurt. Tell her I say so."

"I'd get a lot o' quick lime, Sir George, and see what that 'ud do," was Margery's response; and the words brought up a smile from one or two of her listeners, a solemn moment though it was. Margery's maxim was,

never to contradict the dying; but to humor their hallucinations. "Obstinate things them gorses be!" she continued. "But never you trouble about my missis, sir; she don't mind 'em."

The children, standing round his bed, knew quite well that he was alluding to their mother, his first wife. Indeed, Lady Godolphin appeared to have passed entirely from his mind.

Again he lapsed into silence, and remained to all appearance in a stupor, his eyes closed, his breathing ominously slow. Mr. Crosse took his departure, but the rector and surgeon stayed on yet. The latter saw that the final moment was close at hand, and he whispered to Miss Godolphin that she and her sisters might be better from the room. "At any rate," he added, for he saw the dissenting, displeased look which overspread her face, "it might be as well to spare the sight to Cecil."

"No," briefly responded Miss Godolphin. "Our place is here." And they watched on.

With an impulse of strength surprising to see, Sir George suddenly rose up in bed, his face working, his eyes fixed with a yearning gaze of recognition at the opposite end of the room,—not at the cabinet this time, but at some spot far, far up, through the ceiling, as it appeared. His voice, startling in its height and clearness, rang through the air, and his arms were outstretched as if he were about to fly.

"Janet!—Janet!—Janet! Oh, my dear Janet, I am coming!" And he fell back and died. Did any thing really appear to him, not visible to the mortal eyes around? Were his senses, in that moment of the soul's departure, opened to a glimpse of the world he was about to enter? It cannot be known. Had it been fiction it would not have been written here.

A little later, the bell of All Souls' Church, booming out over the town, in the night air, told that Sir George Godolphin had passed away.

CHAPTER XVII.

A ROW ON THE WATER.

LADY GODOLPHIN arrived at the Folly on the night of Sir George's death,—not an hour subsequent to it. Reassured by the knowledge that no fresh case of fever had occurred since the seizure of Ethel Grame, that it might, in fact, be safely assumed to have quitted the place, and believing Sir George's state to be in the last degree critical, it had pleased my lady to start for Prior's Ash on the day following the one that Sir George had started for it. She reached it at nine o'clock. No carriage was in waiting for her, and she was fain to put up with a fly. It did not please her. She was not in a good temper, and made the want of a carriage a subject of discontent. They ought to have divined that she was coming, she considered, or have sent one at hazard.

When she was taking her seat in it, the tolling out of the death-bell was heard above the bustle of the station. As it came sweeping over the hollow ground between the church of All Souls' and the height on which the station was built, it struck ominously on Lady Godolphin's ear. That it was tolling for some one of consideration, the hour proved: for one of little account, it would have been delayed till morning.

"Who is dead?" she quickly asked of the porter.

"My lady, it—it——" The man stopped, hesitating and stammering. He was a simple, good-hearted sort of chap, and he shrank from speaking out boldly of the loss to Lady Godolphin.

"Can't you tell me?" she sharply cried, in her suspense: for she was one who could not bear the being crossed or left unsatisfied for a single moment.

"I'm afraid, my dear lady, it's—it's somebody connected with Ashlydyat," returned the porter, putting the news into the most considerate English he could call up

"Is it Sir George Godolphin?" she reiterated.

"Well, we have not rightly heard yet that it is him: but it have been known for the past two hours that every moment was expected to be his last," was the man's reply. "In course, hearing the bell ring out, our fears is turned that way, my lady."

She drove on with her French maid to the Folly, leaving the other servants to follow, for she had brought four or five with her. She knew as well that it must be her husband who was gone, as though the information had been of the most positive certainty: and she chose to burst in upon them at the Folly with the reproaches, being perfectly aware in her heart that they had no foundation.

"Did I not tell you that I washed my hands of the journey?" she exclaimed to Thomas Godolphin. "You see what it has done! It has killed your father."

"Not so, Lady Godolphin. I am convinced that his time was come, whether here or at Broomhead. The journey did him no harm whatever. On the contrary, I think it might have been worse, taking all things in conjunction, had he remained where he was."

Thomas quitted her presence as he answered. He was in no mood then for a controversy with Lady Godolphin. Another controversy was to arise soon: or, rather, a grievance which my lady would willingly have made into one, had she been able.

It was somewhat remarkable, another funeral, at which Thomas Godolphin was again chief mourner, following so closely upon Ethel's. A different sort of ceremony, this: a rare pageant,—a pageant which was made up of plumes and trappings and decorated horses, and carriages and mutes and bâtons, and a line of attendants, and all the other insignia of the illustrious dead. Ethel could be interred simply and quietly, but Sir George must be attended to the grave as the Godolphin of Ashlydyat. I don't suppose poor Sir George rested any better for it.

My lady's grievance was connected with the will, which was read upon their return from the funeral. It was an equitable will. Thomas had Ashlydyat; George a fair sum of money; the Miss Godolphins, each her portion; and there were certain bequests to servants. But little was left to Lady Godolphin: indeed, the amount of the bequest was more in accordance with what might be willed to a friend, than to a wife. But it was not in that that the grievance lay. Lady Godolphin had the Folly, she had Broomhead, and she had an ample income of her own. She was not a particularly covetous woman, and she had never expected or wished that Sir George should greatly take from his family, to add to it. No, it was not that: but the contents of a certain little codicil which was appended to the will. This codicil set forth that every article of furniture or property, which had been removed to the Folly from Ashlydyat, whatever might be its nature, and down to the minutest portion, should be returned to Ashlydyat, and become the property of Thomas Godolphin.

It would pretty nearly strip the Folly, and my lady was very wrathful. Not for the value of the things: she sustained no injury there: for the codicil directed that a specific sum of money (their full value) should be handed over to Lady Godolphin to replace them with new at the Folly. But it struck upon her in the light of a slight, and she chose to resent it as one. It was specially enjoined that the things should be placed at Ashlydyat in the old spots where they used to stand.

But be wrathful as she might, grumble as she would, there could be no rebellion to it in action. And Lady Godolphin had to bow to it.

The time went on. Three months glided by; nay, four, for April had come in; and positions were changed. Thomas Godolphin was the master and tenant of Ashlydyat; Janet its acting mistress; Bessy and Cecil resident with them. George had taken up his

residence at the bank, with Margery to look after his comforts, never to remove from it, as he supposed, unless Ashlydyat should fall to him. My lady had quitted the Folly for a permanency, (unless any whim should at any time send her back to it,) and the Verralls had taken it. It may be said that Lady Godolphin gave up the Folly in a fit of pique. When she found the things were positively to go out of it, she protested that she would never replace them with others; she'd rather pitch the money left for the purpose into the sea. She would let it to anybody that would take it, and go back to Broomhead forever. Mr. Verrall heard of this, and made an application to take it; and my lady, smarting yet, let it to him off-hand, accepting him as a yearly tenant. Whether she repented or not, when the deed was done and her anger had cooled down, could not be told: she took her farewell and departed for Scotland without showing signs of it. Many opined that she would come back after a while to the place which she had so eagerly and fondly erected. Perhaps she might: she could get rid of the Verralls at any time by giving them due notice.

Thomas had settled down in his father's place,—head of the bank, head of all things, as Sir George had been,—Mr. Godolphin of Ashlydyat. Mr. George was head of himself alone. Nobody of very particular public note was he; but I can tell you that a vast many more anxious palpitations were cast to him from gentle bosoms, than were given to inapproachable Thomas. It seemed to be pretty generally conceded that Thomas Godolphin was wedded to the grave of Ethel. Perhaps his establishing his sisters at Ashlydyat as their home, help to further the opinion and dash hopes; but very possible hopes from many fair quarters were wafted secretly to George. He would be no mean prize; with his brave good looks, his excellent position, and his presumptive heirloom to Ashlydyat.

April, I say, had come in: a sunny April: and these several changes had

taken place, and the respective parties were settled in their new homes. It went forth to the world that the Veralls intended to give a brilliant fête, a sort of house-warming, as they styled it; and invitations went circulating far and wide. Amongst those favored with one, were Mr. and the Miss Godolphins.

Janet was indignant. She could scarcely bring herself to answer it civilly. Indeed, had she written the answer herself, it would have been sharply dry, rather than civil; but Bessy undertook it. Cecil, who was not less fond of fêtes, and other gay inventions for the killing of time, than are pretty girls in general, would have given her head to go.

"Why would it be so very much out of place, our going?" she inquired of her sister.

Janet looked at her in astonished reproof. "Why! Do you know what it is, child? Did you hear the name they are giving it?"

"An al-fresco fête," responded Cecil.

"Al-fresco folly!" reproved Janet. "They have been styling it a house-warming. A house-warming!" she repeated, emphatically. "A warming for their new home. Who died there, Cecil, and so made way for them to come to it?"

Cecil felt reproved: but the ardent love of fêting was strong within her. "There will only be a little out-door pleasure in the afternoon, and a quiet dance in the evening Janet," she argued in a tone of supplication.

"Eh me, but some of you young girls have light hearts!" uttered Janet. "Your father hardly cold in his grave, and you are hankering to dance horn-pipes on the very spot where he died! Could they have held any house-warming there, girl, but for his death?"

"It is very nearly four months since, Janet."

"If it were twelve months since, it would be equally unfitting for a Godolphin to be seen there," was the reply of Janet.

"I dare say George will go," persisted Cecil.

"George is a heathen,—in many things," hastily replied Miss Godolphin, with more asperity than she often displayed; for, though Janet was firm and cold in manner, she was rarely sharp. George had somehow the knack of falling out of her good graces; she did not make allowance for his youth and his warm nature, so different from her own.

"I should wear deep black; and I'd not stand up once to dance if you desired me not," went on Cecil.

"Let the subject drop," said Janet. "It is impossible that I can allow you to be seen at a house-warming at Lady Godolphin's Folly."

Cecil looked rather gloomy. Gay scenes of festivity were painting themselves vividly in her mind; costly dresses of many colors appeared to wave before her sight, their wearers young and beautiful as she was; sweet sounds of music seemed to be floating on her ears. It was nearly beyond endurance that those other pretty girls should enjoy all these delights while she was excluded.

"Oh, Janet!" she passionately uttered, "I should so like to go!"

"I have told you to let the subject drop," replied Janet, firmly. "Are you forgetting yourself, Cecil?"

Poor Cecil, knowing all hope was over, burst into very undignified tears. Of course, Janet, under the peculiar circumstances, was right, and Cecil was wrong: but it was a sad temptation.

Graceless George turned out a heathen in this, as he did in many other things according to Janet. He was troubled with no compunction at all upon the score, but accepted the invitation as soon as it was given. Janet, meeting him in the street, told him what she thought about it.

"Nonsense!" said George; "I don't look upon the thing in that light. What if they do call it a house-warming? Let them call it so. By going to it I shall lose none of the love I bear my departed father; or abate a jot of the reverence I give to his mem-

ory. There's no reason whatever why I should not be present, Janet; and nobody with a grain of common sense would say there was."

"I know that you take your own way, George, and that you *will* take it," returned Janet. "Do you think any of us but you would be seen there! Do you suppose Thomas would?"

"Thomas never cared for such things much. And he'll not care at all now Ethel's gone. I'd bet a sovereign to a shilling that he never puts his foot inside a ball-room again. But my dancing-pumps have not got their soles worn off yet, Janet."

Leaving George to his heathenism Miss Godolphin continued her way. Presently she encountered Mrs. Hastings. The conversation turned upon the fête,—in fact, Prior's Ash could talk of little else just then,—and Mrs. Hastings mentioned that she had declined the invitation for herself and her daughter.

Not that day, but two or three subsequent to it, this little bit of news came out to George Godolphin. It did not afford him pleasure. Were the truth known, it would be found that he had counted more on the meeting Maria there,—on her assistance towards wearing off the soles of the "pumps" than on any other human being or thing. Decline the invitation! What had possessed Mrs. Hastings?

Mr. George Godolphin was determined to know. Though not a frequent visitor at the rectory,—for he could not go much in the teeth of such evident discouragement as had latterly been shown him by Mr. Hastings, and depended mostly upon chance meetings in the street for keeping in exercise his love-vows to Maria,—he resolved to go boldly down that evening.

Down he accordingly went, and was shown into an empty room. The rector and Mrs. Hastings were out the servant said, and the young ladies were in the study with the boys. She would tell them.

Maria came to him. There was no

mistaking her start of surprise when she saw him, or the rush of emotion which overspread her face.

"Who did you think it was?" asked George.

"I thought it was your brother. She said 'Mr. Godolphin.' Grace will be down in an instant."

"Will she?" returned George. "You had better go and tell her it's Mr. George, and not Mr. Godolphin, and then she won't hurry herself. I am not a favorite with Miss Grace, I fancy."

Maria colored. She had no excuse to offer for the fact, and she could not say that it was untrue. George stood with his elbow on the mantel-piece looking down at her.

"Maria, I hear that Mrs. Hastings has declined to go to the Folly on Thursday. What's that for?"

"I don't know," replied Maria. "We do not go greatly amid those extensively grand scenes," she added, laughing. "Mamma says she always feels as much out of place in them as a fish does out of water. And I think if papa had his private wish we should never go within a mile of any thing of the sort. He likes quiet social visiting, but not such entertainments as the Verrals give. He and mamma were speaking for a few minutes over the invitation, and then she directed Grace to write and decline it."

"Which is an awful shame!" responded George. "I thought I should have had you with me for a few hours that day at any rate, Maria."

Maria lifted her eyes. "It had nothing to do with me, George. I was not invited."

"Not invited!" uttered George Godolphin.

"Only Grace. 'Mrs. and Miss Hastings.'"

"What was that for?" he exclaimed. "Why were you left out?"

"I do not know," replied Maria, bending her eyelids and speaking with involuntary hesitation. In her heart of hearts Maria believed that she did know; but the last person she would have hinted it to was George

Godolphin. "Perhaps," she added, "it may have been an omission, an oversight? Or they may have so many to invite that they can only dispense their cards charily."

"Moonshine!" cried George. "I shall take upon myself to ask Mrs. Verrall why you were left out."

"Oh, George, pray don't!" she uttered, feeling an invincible repugnance to have her name brought up in any such way. "Why should you? Had the invitation been sent to me I should not have gone."

"It is a slight," he persisted. "A little later, and let any dare to show slight to you. They shall be taught better. A slight to you will be a slight to me."

Maria looked at him timidly, and he bent his head with a fond smile. "I shall want somebody to keep house for me at the bank you know, Maria."

She colored even to tears. Mr. George was proceeding to erase them after his own gallant fashion, when he was brought to summarily by the entrance of Grace Hastings.

There was certainly no love lost between them. Grace did not like George,—George did not like Grace. She took her seat demurely in her mother's chair of state with every apparent intention of sitting out his visit. So George cut it short.

"What did he come for?" Grace asked of Maria when the servant had shown him out.

"He came to call."

"You appeared to be very close in conversation when I came into the room," pursued Grace, searching Maria with her keen eyes. "May I ask its purport?"

"Its purport was nothing wrong," said Maria, her cheeks deepening under the inspection. "You question me, Grace, as if I were a child, and you possessed a right over me."

"Well?" said Grace, equably. "What was he talking of?"

Yielding, timid, sensitive Maria was one of the last to resist this sort of importunity. "We had been talking of the Verralls not including me in

the invitation. George said it was a slight."

"As of course it was," assented Grace. "And for that fact alone I am glad mamma sent them a refusal. It was Charlotte Pain's doings. She does not care that you should be brought too much into contact with George Godolphin, lest her chance should be perilled. Now, Maria, don't pretend to look at me in that incredulous manner! You know as well as I do that George has a stupid liking for you, or at least acts as though he had, which naturally is not pleasant to Charlotte Pain."

Maria knew well that Grace had divined the true cause of the neglect. She stood for a few minutes looking silent and humble: an intimation even from Grace that George "liked her" jarred upon her refined sensitiveness when spoken openly. But that feeling was almost lost in the dull pain which the hint touching Charlotte had called up.

"Charlotte Pain is nothing to George Godolphin," she resentfully said.

"Charlotte Pain is," responded Grace. "And if your eyes are not yet opened to it, they ought to be. She is to be his wife."

"Oh, no, she is not," hastily said Maria.

"Maria, I tell you that she is. I know it."

Now, Grace Hastings rarely made an assertion unless she had good grounds for it. Maria knew that. And the dull pain at her heart grew into something that beat against it with a sharp agony. She appeared impassive enough, looking down at her thin gold chain, which her fingers were unconsciously wreathing into knots. "You cannot know it, Grace."

"I tell you I do. Mind you, I don't say that they will inevitably be married; only, that they contemplate being so at present. Charlotte does well not to make too sure of him! He may see half a dozen yet whom he will prefer to Charlotte Pain, in his roving, butterfly nature."

Was Grace right? Not ten min-

utes previously, Maria had listened to words from his lips which most surely intimated that it was herself George had chosen. Who was Charlotte?—who was Charlotte Pain, that she should thus thrust herself between them?

April, as we learn both by its reputation and by our own experience, mocks us with its weather: and not a few envious critics had prognosticated showers, if not snow, for the fête at Lady Godolphin's Folly. The unusually lovely weather which had marked the month, so far as it had gone, had put it into Mrs. Verrall's head to give an out-door entertainment. Mr. Verrall had himself suggested that the weather might change; that there was no dependence, at this season of the year, to be placed on it. But she would not change her project. If the worst came to the worst at the last moment, she said, they must do the best they could with them indoors.

But, for once, the weather was not fickle. The day rose warm, calm, beautifully bright, and by three o'clock in the afternoon most of the gay revelers had gathered at the Folly.

The grounds were dotted with them. These grounds, by the way, were mostly the grounds of Ashlydyat,—those pertaining to the Folly being of exceedingly limited extent. Janet Godolphin drew down the blinds of Ashlydyat, that the eyesore might be shut out: but Cecil stole away to her room, and made herself a peep-hole,—like the young Hastingses had done at Ethel Grame's funeral,—and looked out with covetous eyes. Janet had said something to Thomas about sending a hint to the Folly that the domains of Ashlydyat would not be free for the guests: but Thomas, with his quiet good sense, had negatived it.

Graceless George arrived as large as life,—one of the first. He was making himself conspicuous among the many-colored groups,—or, perhaps it was, that they made him so, by gathering round him,—when two

figures in mourning came gliding up behind him, one of whom spoke:

"How do you do, Mr. George Godolphin?"

George turned. And,—careless and thoughtless as he was, graceless as he was reported to be,—a shock of surprise, not unmixed with indignation, swept over his feelings: for those, standing before him, were Lady Sarah and Miss Grame.

She—Sarah Anne—looked like a shadow still,—peevish, white, discontented. What brought them there? Was it *thus* that they showed their regrets for the dead Ethel? Was it seemly that Sarah Anne should appear at a fête of gayety in her weak, sickly state,—not yet recovered from the effects of the fever,—not yet out of the first deep mourning, worn for Ethel?"

"How do you do, Lady Sarah?" very gravely responded George Godolphin.

Lady Sarah may have discerned somewhat of his feelings from the expression on his face. Not that he intentionally suffered it to rise in reproof of her: George Godolphin did not set himself up in judgment against his fellows. He, indeed! Lady Sarah drew him aside with her, after he had shaken hands with Sarah Anne.

"I am sure it must look strange to you to see us here, Mr. George. But, poor child, she continues so weak and poorly, that I scarcely know what to do with her. She set her heart upon coming to this fête. Since Mrs. Verrall's card arrived, she has talked of nothing else, and I thought it would not do to cross her. Is Mr. Godolphin here?"

"Oh, no," replied George, with more haste than he need have spoken.

"I thought he would not be. I remarked so to Sarah Anne, when she expressed a hope of seeing him: indeed, I think it was that hope which chiefly urged her to come. What have we done to him, Mr. George? He scarcely ever comes near the house."

"I don't know any thing about it,"

returned George. "I can see that my brother feels his loss deeply yet. It may be, Lady Sarah, that visits to your house remind him of Ethel too forcibly."

Lady Sarah lowered her voice to a confidential whisper: "Will he ever marry, think you?"

"At present I should be inclined to say he never would," answered George, wondering what in the world it could matter to Lady Sarah, and thinking she evinced little sorrow or consideration for the memory of Ethel. "But time works surprising changes," he added: "and time may marry Mr. Godolphin."

Lady Sarah paused. "How do you think she looks,—my poor child?"

"Miserable," all but rose to the tip of George's tongue. "She does not look well," he said, aloud.

"And she does so regret her dear sister; she's grieving after her always," said Lady Sarah, putting up her handkerchief to her eyes.

"I don't believe it," thought George to himself.

"How do you like your new residence?" she resumed, passing with little ceremony to another topic.

"I like it very well. All places are pretty much alike to a bachelor, Lady Sarah."

"Ah, so they are. You won't remain a bachelor very long," continued Lady Sarah, with a smile of jocularity.

"Not so very long, I dare say," frankly acknowledged Mr. George. "It is possible I may put my head in the noose sometime in the next ten years."

She would have detained him further, but George did not care to be detained. He went after more attractive companionship.

Chance, or premeditation, led him to Charlotte Pain. Charlotte had all her attractions about her that day. Her bright-green silk dress,—green was a favorite color of hers,—with its white-lace mantle, was frequently to be seen by George Godolphin's side. Once they strayed to the borders of

the stream, in a remote part of the grounds. Several were gathered here. A row on the water had been proposed, and a boat stood ready,—a small boat, holding very few: but, of those few, George and Charlotte made two.

Could George Godolphin have foreseen what that simple little excursion in the boat was to do for him, he had never entered it. How is it, that no shadow of warning comes over us at these times? How many a day's pleasure, begun as a jubilee, how many a voyage, entered upon in hope, ends but in death! Not a fortnight since *now*, the very hour at which I am writing, a fine young lad, fresh from his studies, was going out to one of our colonies, full of youth, of hope, of prospects. Two ships were offering for the passage, one as convenient as the other: which should he choose? It seemed not to signify which, and the choice was made. Could *no* warning rise up to his aid, ever so indefinite, and point away from that chosen one and say it must be shunned? The ship sailed. And she has gone down; within sight of land; not three days out; and every soul on board, save one, has perished. "If we had but fixed upon the other ship for him!" wail now that lad's mourning friends. Ay! if we could but lift the veil, what mistakes might be avoided!

George Godolphin, strong and active, took the oars. And when they had rowed about to their hearts' content, and George was in a white heat with exertion, they bethought themselves that they would land for a while on what was called the mock island,—a mossy spot, green and tempting to the eye. In stepping ashore, Charlotte Pain tripped, lost her balance, and would have been in the water but for George. He saved her, but he could not save her parasol,—a dainty parasol, for which Miss Charlotte had given three guineas only the previous day. She naturally shrieked when it went, plunge into the water: and George Godolphin, in recovering

it, nearly lost *his* balance, and went in after the parasol. Nearly: not quite: he got himself pretty wet, but he made light of it, and sat himself down on the grassy island with the rest.

The party were all young. Old people don't much care to venture in the shallow, tilting skiffs: but, had any of mature age been there, experienced in chills and rheumatism, they would certainly have ordered George Godolphin home at the top of his speed, to get a change of clothes, and perhaps a glass of brandy.

Charlotte Pain was shaking the wet off her parasol, when somebody noticed the dripping state of George's coat. "It wants shaking also," said they. "Do pray take it off, Mr. George Godolphin?"

George took it off, shook it well, and laid it out in the sun to dry, sailor-fashion. And down he sat again, in his shirt-sleeves, passing some jokes upon his state of costume, and requesting to know what apology he must make for it.

By-and-by he began to feel rather chill: in fact he grew so cold that he put on his coat again, damp as it was. It might have occurred to him that the intense perspiration he had been in was struck inwards, but it did not. In the evening he was dancing away with the best of them, apparently having escaped all ill effects from the wetting, and thinking no further of it.

Eh, but the young are heedless! as Janet would have said.

CHAPTER XVIII.

STRAW IN THE STREETS.

ANKLE-DEEP before the banking-house of Godolphin, Crosse, and Godolphin, and for some distance on either side,—ankle-deep down Crosse Street as far as you could see,—lay masses of straw. As carriages came up to traverse it, their drivers checked their

horses and drove them at a foot-pace, raising their own heads to look up at the windows of the dwelling; for they knew that one was lying there, hovering between life and death.

It was George Godolphin. Imprudent George! Healthy and strong as he might be, sound as his constitution was, that little episode of the fête-day had told upon him. Few men can do such things with impunity, and come out unscathed. "What was a bit of a ducking; and that only a partial one? Nothing,"—as George himself said to some remonstrator on the subsequent day. It is not much, certainly, to those who are used to it: but, taken in conjunction with a reeking perspiration, and with an hour or two's cooling upon the grass afterwards, in the airy undress of shirt-sleeves, it is a great deal.

It had proved a great deal for George Godolphin. An attack of rheumatic fever supervened, dangerous and violent, and neither Dr. Beale nor Mr. Snow could give a guess whether he would live or die. Miss Godolphin had removed to the bank to share with Margery the task of nursing him. Knockers were muffled; bells were tied up; straw, as you hear, was laid down in the streets; people passed in and out, even at the swing-doors, when they went to transact business, with a softened tread: and as they counted the cash for their checks, they leaned over the counter, and asked the clerks in a whisper whether Mr. George was alive yet. Yes, he was alive, the clerks could always answer, but it was as much as they could say.

It continued to be "as much as they could say" for nearly a month, and then George Godolphin began to improve. But so slowly! day after day seemed to pass without visible sign.

How bore up Maria Hastings! None could know the dread, the grief, that was at work within her, or the deep love she felt for George Godolphin. Her nights were sleepless, her days were restless: she lost her appe-

life, her energy, almost her health. Mrs. Hastings wondered what was amiss with her, and hoped Maria was not going to be one of those sickly ones who always seem to fade in the spring.

Maria could speak out her sorrow to none. Grace would not have sympathized with any feeling so strong, whose object was George Godolphin. And had Grace sympathized ever so, Maria would not have spoken it. She possessed that shrinking reticence of feeling, that refined sensitiveness, to which the betraying its own emotions to another would be little less than death. Maria could not trust her voice to ask after him: when Mr. Hastings or her brothers would come in and say (as they had, more than once), "There's a report in the town that George Godolphin's dead," she could not press upon them her eager questions, and ask, "Is it likely to be true? Are there any signs that it is true? Once, when this rumor came in, Maria made an excuse to go out: some trifle to be purchased in the town, she said to Mrs. Hastings: and went down the street inwardly shivering, too agitated to notice acquaintances whom she met; and, opposite the bank, she stole her glances up to its private windows, and saw that the blinds were down. In point of fact, this told nothing, for the blinds had been kept down much since George's illness, the servants not troubling themselves to lift them: but to the fears of Maria Hastings, it spoke volumes. Sick, trembling, she continued her way mechanically: she did not dare to stop even for a moment, or to show, in her timidity, as much as the anxiety of an indifferent friend. At that moment Mr. Snow came out of the house, and crossed over.

Maria stopped then. Surely she might halt to speak to the surgeon without being suspected of undue interest in Mr. George Godolphin. She even brought out the words, as Mr. Snow shook hands with her, "You have been to the bank."

"Yes, poor fellow, he is in a critical

state," was Mr. Snow's answer. "But I think there's a faint indication of improvement this afternoon."

In the revulsion of feeling which the words gave, Maria forgot her caution. "He is not dead, then?" she uttered, all too eagerly, her face turning to a glowing crimson, her lips apart with emotion.

Mr. Snow gathered in the signs, and a grave expression stole over his lips; but the next minute he was smiling openly. "No, he is not dead yet, Miss Maria; and we must see what we can do towards keeping him alive." Maria turned home again with a beating and a thankful heart.

A weary, weary summer for George Godolphin,—a weary, weary illness. It was more than two months before he rose from his bed at all, and it was nearly two more before he went down the stairs of the dwelling-house. A fine balmy day it was, the one in June, when George was got out of his bed the first time, and put in the easy-chair, wrapped up in blankets. The sky was blue, the sun was warm, and bees and butterflies sported in the summer air. George turned his weary eyes, weary with pain, with weakness, towards the cheering signs of out-door life, and wondered whether he should ever be abroad again.

It was August before that time came. Early in that month the close carriage of Ashlydyat waited at the door to take Mr. George his first airing. A shadowy object he looked,—Mr. Snow on one side of him, Margery on the other; Janet, who would be his companion in the drive, following. They got him down-stairs between them, and into the carriage. From that time his recovery, though slow, was progressive; and in another week he was removed to Ashlydyat for change. He could walk abroad then with two sticks, or with a stick and somebody's arm. George, who was getting up his spirits wonderfully, declared he and his sticks should be made into a picture and sent to the next exhibition of native artists.

One morning he and his two sticks

were sunning themselves in the porch of Ashlydyat, when a stranger approached and accosted him,—a gentlemanly looking man in a straw hat, with a light, traveling-overcoat thrown upon his arm. George looked a gentleman also, in spite of his dilapidated state of flesh and his sticks, and the stranger raised his hat with something of foreign urbanity.

"Does Mr. Verrall reside here?"

"No," replied George.

A defiant, hard sort of expression rose immediately to the stranger's face. It almost seemed to imply that George was deceiving him; and his next words bore out the impression. "I have been informed that he does reside here," he said, with a stress upon the "does."

"He did reside here," replied George Godolphin: "but he does so no longer. That is where Mr. Verrall lives," he added, pointing one of his sticks at the white walls of Lady Godolphin's Folly.

The stranger wheeled round on his heel, took a survey of it, and then lifted his hat again, apparently satisfied. "Thank you, sir," he said. "The mistake was mine. Good-morning."

George watched him away as he strode with a firm, elastic, quick step towards the Folly. George wondered when he should walk again with the same step. Perhaps the notion, or the desire to do so, actuated him to try it then. He rose from his seat and went tottering out, drawing his sticks with him. It was a tempting morning, and George strolled on in its brightness, resting on this bench, resting on that, when he was tired, and then bearing on again.

"I might get as far as the Folly, if I tried well, and took my time," he said to himself. "Would it not be a surprise to them!"

So he bore onwards to the Folly, like the stranger had done. He was drawing very near it,—was seated, in fact, on the last bench that he intended to sit on,—when Mr. Verrall passed.

"Have you had a gentleman inquiring for you?" George asked him

"What gentleman?" demanded Mr. Verrall.

"He was a stranger. He came to Ashlydyat, supposing you resided there. I sent him to the Folly."

"Describe him, will you?" said Mr. Verrall.

"I noticed nothing much describable," replied George. "He wore a straw hat, and had a thin, tweed coat on his arm. I should fancy he had just come off a journey."

Mr. Verrall left George where he was, and went back to the Folly. George rose and followed more slowly. But when he got beyond the trees, he saw that Mr. Verrall must have plunged into them,—as if he would enter the Folly by the servants'-door at the back. George crossed the lawn, and made straight for the drawing-room windows, which stood open.

Scarcely had he entered, and flung himself into the first easy-chair which stood handy, when he saw the same stranger approach the house. Where had he been, not to have found it before? But George immediately divined that he had taken the wrong turning near the ash-trees, and so had had the pleasure of a round to Prior's Ash and back again. The room was empty, and George sat recovering breath, and enjoying the luxury of rest, when the stranger's knock resounded at the hall-door.

A servant, as he could hear, came forth to open it; but, before that was effected, flying footsteps followed the man across the hall, and he was called to, in the voice of Charlotte Pain.

"James," said she, in a half-whisper, which came distinctly to the ear of George Godolphin, "should that be any one for Mr. Verrall, show him in here."

A second room, a smaller one, stood between the one George had entered, and the hall. It opened both to the drawing-room and the hall: in fact, it served as a sort of ante-room to the drawing-room. It was into this room that the stranger was shown.

Charlotte, who had taken a seat, and was toying with some embroidery-

work, making believe to be busy over it, rose at his entrance, with the prettiest air of surprise imaginable. He could have staked his life, had he been required to do it, that she knew nothing whatever of his approach until that identical moment, when James threw open the door and announced "A gentleman, ma'am." James had been unable to announce him in more definite terms. Upon his asking the stranger what name, the curt answer had been, "Never mind the name. Mr. Verrall knows me."

Charlotte rose. And the gentleman's abruptness changed to courtesy at the sight of her. "I wish to see Mr. Verrall," he said.

"Mr. Verrall is in town," replied Charlotte.

"In town!" was the answer, delivered in an accent of excessive surprise. "Do you mean in London, madam?"

"Certainly," rejoined Charlotte. "In London."

"But he only left London last night to come here!" was the stranger's answer.

It brought Charlotte to a pause.

Self-possessed as she was, she had to think a moment before hazarding another assertion. "May I inquire how you know that he left London last night for this?" she asked.

"Because, madam, I had business yesterday of the very last importance with Mr. Verrall. He made the appointment himself, for three o'clock. I went at three, and could not find him. I went at four, and waited an hour, with the like result. I went again at seven, and then I was told that Mr. Verrall had been telegraphed for to his country-seat, and had started. I had some difficulty in finding out where his country-seat was situated, but I succeeded in doing that: and I followed him in the course of the night."

"How very unfortunate!" exclaimed Charlotte, who had gained her clue. "He was telegraphed for yesterday, and arrived in answer to it, getting here very late last night.

But he could not stay. He said he had business to attend to in London, and he left here this morning by an early train. Will you oblige me with your name?" she added.

"My name, madam, is Appleby. It is possible you may have heard Mr. Verrall mention it, if, as I presume, I have the honor of speaking to Mrs. Verrall."

Charlotte did not undecieve him. "When did you see Mr. Verrall last?" she suddenly inquired, as if the thought had just struck her.

"The day before yesterday. I saw him three times that day, and he made the appointment for the following one."

"I am so sorry you should have had a useless journey," said Charlotte, with much sympathy.

"I am sorry also," said the stranger. "Sorry for the delay this causes in certain arrangements: which delay I can ill afford. I will wish you good-morning, madam, and start back by the first train."

Charlotte touched the bell, and courtseyed her adieu. The stranger had the door open, when he turned round, and spoke again:

"I presume I may entirely rely upon what you tell me,—that Verrall is gone back?"

"Oh, certainly," answered Charlotte.

Now, every syllable of this colloquy had reached the ears of George Godolphin. It puzzled him not a little. Were there *two* Verralls? The Verrall of the Folly, with whom he had so recently exchanged words, had certainly not been in London for a fortnight past, or anywhere else but in that neighborhood. And what did Charlotte mean, by saying he had gone to town that morning?

Charlotte came in, singing a scrap of a song. She started when she saw George, and then flew to him in a glow of delight, holding out her hands.

What could he do but take them? What could he do but draw Charlotte down by him on the sofa, holding them still. "How pleased I am to

see you!" exclaimed Charlotte. "I shall think the dear old times are coming round again."

"Charlotte mia, do you know what I have been obliged to hear? That interesting confab you have been taking part in, in the next room."

Charlotte burst into a laugh. From the moment when she first caught a glimpse of George, seated there, she had felt sure that he must have heard it. "Did I do it well?" she cried, triumphantly.

"How could you invent such fibs?"

"Verrall came up-stairs to me and Kate," said Charlotte, laughing more merrily than before. "He said there was somebody going to call here, he thought with a begging petition, and he did not care to see him. Would I go and put the man off. I asked him how I should put him off, and he answered, 'Any way. Say he had gone to London, if I liked.'"

Was Charlotte telling truth or falsehood? That there was more in all this than met the eye was evident. It was no business of George Godolphin's, neither did he make it his.

And you have really walked here all the way by yourself!" she resumed. "I am so glad! You will get well now all one way."

"I don't know about getting well 'all one way,' Charlotte. The doctors have been ordering me away for the winter."

"For the winter!" repeated Charlotte, her tone growing sober. "What for? Where to?"

"To some place where the skies are more genial than in this cold climate of ours," replied George. "If I wish to get thoroughly well, they say, I must start off next month, September, and not return till April."

"But—should you go alone?"

"There's the worst of it. We poor bachelor fellows are like stray sheep,—nobody owning us, nobody caring for us."

"Take somebody with you," suggested Charlotte.

"That's easier said than done," laughed George.

Charlotte threw one of her brilliant

glances at him. She had risen, and was standing before him, all her attractions in full play. "There's an old saying, Mr. George Godolphin, that where there's a will, there's a way," quoth she.

George made a gallant answer, and they were progressing in each other's good graces to their own content, when an interruption came to it. The same servant who had opened the door to the stranger entered.

"Miss Pain, if you please, my master says will you step to him."

"I declare you make me forget every thing," cried Charlotte to George, as she quitted the room. And picking up her King Charley, she threw it at him. "There! take care of him, Mr. George Godolphin, until I come back again."

A few minutes subsequently, George saw Mr. Verrall leave the house and cross the lawn. A servant behind him was bearing a small portmanteau and an overcoat, like the stranger had carried on his arm. Was Mr. Verrall likewise going to London?

CHAPTER XIX.

ONE STICK DISCARDED.

The morning sun shone on the green lawn, on the clustering flowers, rich in their many colors, sweet in their exhaling perfumes, before the breakfast-room at Ashlydyat. The room itself was in the shade: as it is pleasant in summer for a room to be: but the windows stood open to the delights of out-door life.

Janet presided at the breakfast-table. She always did preside. Thomas, Bessy, and Cecil were disposed around her; leaving the side of the table next the windows vacant, that no obstruction might intervene between the sight of any and the view of the summer's morning,—a summer that would soon be on the wane, for September was approaching.

"She ought to be here by four o'clock," observed Bessy, continuing the conversation. "Otherwise, she cannot be here until seven. There's no train comes in from Farnley between four o'clock and seven, is there, Thomas?"

"I think not," replied Thomas Godolphin. "But I really know very little about their branch lines. Stay, Farnley? No: I remember: I am sure there is nothing in between four and seven."

"Don't fash yourselves," said Janet, in composure, who had been occupied with the urn. "When Mrs. Briscow sends me word she will arrive by the afternoon train, I know she can only mean the one that gets here at four o'clock: and I shall be there at four in the carriage to meet her. She is early in her notions, and she would have called seven the night train."

Cecil, who appeared more engaged in toying with the black ribbons that were flowing from the pretty white sleeves round her pretty wrists, than in eating her breakfast, looked up at her sister. "How long is it since she was here last, Janet?"

"She was here the summer after your mother died."

"All that while!" exclaimed Cecil. "A few years do seem an 'all' to the young."

"It is very good of her to leave her home at her age, and come amongst us once again!" said Bessy.

"It is George who is bringing her here; I am sure of that," returned Janet. "She was so concerned about his illness. She wants to see him, now he is getting better. George was always her favorite."

"How is George this morning?" inquired Thomas Godolphin.

"George is alive," replied a voice from the door, which had opened. There stood George himself.

Alive decidedly; but weak and wan still. He could walk with the help of one stick now.

"If I don't make an effort—as somebody says in that book-case—I may

remain a puny invalid, like a woman. I thought I'd try and surprise you."

They made ready a place for him, and put a chair, and set good things before him,—all in affectionate eagerness. But George Godolphin could not accomplish much breakfast yet. "My appetite is capricious, Janet," he observed. "I think to-morrow I will try chocolate and milk."

"A cup can be made at once, George, if you would like it."

"No, I don't care about it now. I suppose the doctors are right,—that I can't get into proper order again, without change. A dull time of it, I shall have, whatever place they may exile me to."

A question had been mooted, bringing somewhat of vexation in its discussion, touching the accompanying of George. Whether he should be accompanied at all, in what he was pleased to term his exile: and, if so, by whom. Janet could not go; or thought she could not: Ashlydyat wanted her. Bessy was deep in her schools, her district visiting, in parish affairs generally, and openly said she did not care to quit them just now. Cecil was perfectly ready and willing. Had George been going to the wilds of Africa, Cecil would have entered on the journey with enthusiasm: the outer world had attractions for Cecil and her inexperience. But Janet did not deem it expedient to trust pretty Cecil to the sole guardianship of thoughtless George, and that was put down ere Cecil had well spoken of it. George's private opinion was—and he spoke it publicly—that he should be better without any of them than with them; that they would "only be a bother." On one point, he turned entirely restive. Janet's idea had been to despatch Margery with him; to see after his comforts, his medicines, his warm beds, and his beef-tea. Not if he knew it, George answered. Why not set him up with a staff of women at once—a lady's-maid, and a nurse from the hospitals, in addition to Margery? And he was

pleased to indulge in so much ridicule upon the point, as to anger Janet and offend Margery.

"I wish I knew some fellow who was going yachting for the next six months, and would give me boat-room," observed George, stirring his tea listlessly.

"That would be an improvement!" said Janet, speaking in satire. "Six months' sea-sickness and sea-wetting would about do for you what the fever has left undone."

"So it might," said George. "Only that we get over sea-sickness in a couple of days, and sea-wettings are healthy. However, don't let it disturb your placidity: the yacht is wanting, and I am not likely to get the opportunity of trying it. No thank you, Janet"—rejecting a plate she was offering him—"I cannot eat it."

"Mrs. Briscow comes to-day, George," observed Bessy. "Janet is going to meet her at the station at three. She is coming purposely to see you."

"Very amiable of the old lady!" responded George. "What's she like, Janet? I have forgotten her. Does she wear a front, or her own gray locks?"

Cecil laughed. Janet administered a reproof: to George for his ridicule, to Cecil for laughing at it. "You will see what she is like, if you wait patiently until dinner-time, George."

"I fear the pleasure will have to be deferred a little later," returned George. "I am going out to dinner."

"Nay, George," quickly returned Janet, "but you must be at home or dinner to-day."

"I have promised to go out, Janet."

Even Thomas looked surprised. George was not yet in precisely going-out-to-dinner condition.

"I have promised Mrs. Verrall to get as far as the Folly this afternoon, and stay to dine with them. *En famille*, you know."

"Mr. Verrall is not at home," said Bessy, quickly.

"But she and Charlotte are," responded George.

"You know you must not be out in the night air, George."

"I shall be home by sundown, or thereabouts. Not that the night air would hurt me now."

"The doctors say it would, George," urged Bessy.

"Of course they do. Doctors must croak, or how would their trade go on? They intend dining at five to accommodate me. I shall not stay afterwards."

"You cannot partake of rich dishes yet," urged Bessy again.

"*Bien entendu*. Mrs. Verrall has ordered an array of invalid ones: mutton-broth *à l'eau*, and boiled whitening *au naturel*," responded George, who appeared to have an answer ready for all dissentient propositions.

Janet interposed, — looking and speaking very gravely. "George, it will be a great mark of disrespect to Mrs. Briscow, the lifelong friend of your father and mother, not to be at home to sit at table with her the first day she is here. Only one thing could excuse your absence,—urgent business,—and that you have not to plead."

George answered tartly. He was weak from recent illness, and like many others under the same circumstances did not relish being crossed in trifles. "Janet, you are unreasonable. As if it were requisite that I should break a promise just for the purpose of dining with an old woman! There'll be plenty of other days that I can dine with her. And I shall be at home this evening before you have well risen from table."

"I beg you to speak of Mrs. Briscow with more respect, George. It cannot matter whether you stay at the Verralls to-day or another day," persisted Janet.

"It matters to me. I have set my mind upon it. You can tell Mrs. Briscow that it was an engagement entered into before I knew she would be here: that I would not have made it, had I known. As I would not."

"I'd not say a word against it were it an engagement of consequence. You can go to the Folly any day."

"But I choose to go to-day," said George.

Janet fixed her deep eyes upon him, —her gaze one of sad penetration, her voice changed to one of mourning. "Have those women fixed a spell upon ye, lad?"

It drove away George's ill-humor. He burst into a laugh, and returned the gaze openly enough. "Not they, Janet. Mrs. Verrall may have spells to cast for aught I know: it's Verrall's business,—not mine: but they have certainly not been directed to me. And Charlotte——"

"Ay," put in Janet, in a lower tone, "what of Charlotte Pain?"

"This: Janet. That I can steer clear of any spells cast by Charlotte Pain. Not but what I admire Charlotte very much," he added, in a little spirit of mischief. "I assure you I am quite a slave to her fascinations."

"Keep you out of her fascinations, lad," returned Janet, in a tone of solemn meaning. "It's my first and best advice to you."

"I will, Janet, when I find them grow dangerous."

Janet said no more. There was that expression on her countenance which they well knew, telling of grievous dissatisfaction. Thomas rose. He had finished his breakfast.

"You will be home to dinner?" Janet said to him with emphasis, as he prepared to leave.

"Certainly," he answered, turning to her with a slight gesture of surprise. "I generally do come home to it, Janet."

"Ay." And Janet sat beating her foot on the floor softly and slowly, as was her custom when in disquietude or in deep thought.

The rising earlier than his strength was as yet equal to told upon George Godolphin; and by the middle of the day he felt so full of weariness and lassitude that he was glad to throw himself on the sofa in the large drawing-room,—quiet and unoccupied then,—pushing the couch, first of all, with his feeble powers, close to the window that he might be in the sunshine. The

warm sunshine was grateful to him. Here he dropped asleep, and only woke from it considerably later at the entrance of Cecil.

Cecil was dressed for the day in a thin, flowing black dress,—a jet necklace on her slender neck, jet bracelets on her fair arms. A fair flower was Cecilia Godolphin,—none fairer within all the precincts of Prior's Ash. She kelt down by George and kissed him.

"We have been in to glance at you two or three times, George. Margery has got something nice for you, and would have aroused you to take it,—only she says sleep will do you as much good as food."

"What's the time?" asked George, too indolent to take his own watch from his pocket.

"Half-past three."

"Nonsense!" cried George, partially starting up. "It can't be so late as that."

"It is indeed. Janet has just driven off to the railway. Don't rise this minute: you are all in a perspiration."

"I wonder Janet let me sleep so long?"

"Why should she not? Janet has been very busy all day, and very——"

"Cross?" put in George.

"I was going to say silent," replied Cecil. "You vexed her this morning, George."

"There was nothing that she need have been vexed at," responded Mr. George.

Cecil remained for a few moments without speaking. "I think Janet is afraid of Charlotte Pain," she presently said.

"Afraid of Charlotte Pain! In what way?"

"George,"—lowering her voice and running her fingers caressingly through his bright hair as he lay,— "I wish you would let me ask you something."

"Ask away," replied George.

"Ay: but will you answer me?"

"That depends," he laughed. "Ask away, Cely."

"Is there any thing between you and Charlotte Pain?"

"Plenty," returned George, in the

lightest possible tone. "Like there is between me and a dozen more young ladies. Charlotte happening to be the nearest gets most of me just now."

"Plenty of what?"

"Talking and laughing and gossip. That's about the extent of it, pretty Cely."

Cecil wished he would be more serious. "Shall you be likely to marry her?" she breathed.

"Just as likely as I shall be to marry you." And he spoke seriously now.

Cecil drew a sigh of relief. "Then, George, I will tell you what it is that has helped to vex Janet. You know our servants get talking to Mrs. Verrall's, and her servants to ours. And the news was brought here that Charlotte Pain has said she would probably be going on a journey,—a journey abroad, for six months or so,—somewhere where she should stop the winter. Margery told Janet,—and—and——"

"You construed it, between you, that Charlotte was going to be a partner in my exile! What droll people you must all be!"

"Why, George?"

"Why! Are wedding-toilettes got up in that hasty fashion, Miss Cecil? I must be away in a fortnight. It would take you ladies longer to fix upon your orange-wreath alone."

"There's no doubt, George, that Charlotte Pain was heard to say it."

"I don't know what she may have been heard to say. It could have borne no reference to my movements. Cecil?"

"Well?"

"Did you ever hear of old Max's hounds losing their scent?"

"No—I don't know. What do you mean?"

And while George Godolphin was laughing at her puzzled look, Margery came in. "Be you a'most famished, Mr. George? How could you think of dropping off to sleep till you had had something to sustain you?"

"We often do things that we don't

'think' to do, Margery," quoth he, as he rose from the sofa.

"Nothing more true, Mr. George Godolphin."

Ere long he was on his way to Mrs. Verrall's. Notwithstanding Janet's displeasure, he had no idea of foregoing his engagement. The society of two attractive women had more charms for listless George, than quiet Ashlydyat. It was a lovely afternoon, less hot than it had been of late, and George really enjoyed it. He was beginning to walk so much better. That long sleep had rested and refreshed him, and he believed that he could walk well into Prior's Ash. "I'll try it to-morrow," thought George.

Up the steps, over the terrace, across to the open windows of the Folly,—it was the easiest way in, and George was not given to use unnecessary ceremony. He supposed he might find the ladies in the drawing-room, and he stepped over the window's threshold.

Only one was there,—Charlotte. She did not see him enter. She was before a pier-glass, holding up her dog, King Charley, that he might snarl and bark at the imaginary King Charley in the glass. That other dog of hers, the ugly Scotch terrier which you have heard of before, and a third, looking something like a bull-dog, were leaping and howling at her feet. It would appear that nothing pleased Charlotte better than the putting her dogs into a fury. Charlotte wore a dark-blue silk dress with shaded flounces, and a lighter blue silk jacket,—the latter, ornamented with braidings and buttons of silver, somewhat after the fashion of her green riding-habit, and as tight to the shape as that was. A well-formed shape!—and George Godolphin thought so, as she stood with her arms lifted, setting the dog at the glass.

"Hi, King! Seize him, Charley! Go at him!—hiss! Let fly at him, dog! Tear him! bite him!—hiss—ss—ss!"

The noisy reception by the other dogs of Mr. George Godolphin, brought

the young lady's words and her pretty employment to a stand-still. She released the prisoned dog from her arms, letting him drop anywhere, and turned to George Godolphin.

"Have you come at last? I had given you up! I expected you an hour and a-half ago."

"And to while away the time you set your dogs on to snarl and fight!" returned he, as he took her hand. "I wonder you don't go distracted with the noise, Charlotte!"

"You don't like dogs! I often tell you so."

"Yes I do,—in their proper places."

Charlotte turned from him with a pout. The terrier jumped upon her.

"Down, Pluto, down! There's a gentleman here who thinks I ought to hold you poor dogs at arms-length."

"At the yard's-length, if you please, Charlotte," corrected George, who did not feel inclined to compromise his words. "Hark at them! They may be heard at Prior's Ash."

"And his name's George Godolphin, good Pluto!" went on Charlotte, doing all she possibly could, in a quiet way, to excite the dogs. "Down, then, Pluto! down!"

"I should muzzle you, Mr. Pluto, if you were mine," cried George, as the dog jumped up at him furiously, and then turned to attack his former adversary. "*Pluto!*" he continued, meaningly; "who gave him that name, Charlotte?"

"I did," avowed Charlotte. "And I named this other one King Charley, in accordance with his species. And this one is Deuce. What have you to say against the names?"

"Nothing," said George. "I think them very good, appropriate names," he added, his lips parting.

They were certainly very good dogs,—if to make a most excruciating noise constitutes goodness. George Godolphin, his nerves in a shattered state, lifted his hand wearily to his forehead. It brought Charlotte Pain to her recollection.

"Oh, George, I forgot! I d'd, really! I forgot you were not as

strong yet as the rest of us. Be quiet, then, you three horrid brutes! Be quiet, will you! Get off, and quarrel outside."

Using her pointed toe rather liberally, Charlotte set herself to scatter the dogs. They were not very obedient. As soon as one was got out, another sprung in, the noise never ceasing. Charlotte snatched up a basket of macaroons that happened to be on a side-table, and scattered the cakes on the terrace. "There! quarrel and fight over those!"

She put down the empty basket, closed the window to shut out the noise, and turned to George. Pulling her dress out on either side, after the manner once in vogue for ancient ball-rooms, she dropped him an elaborate curtsy.

"Mr. George Godolphin, what honor do you suppose is thrust upon me to-day?"

"You must tell me, Charlotte, if it's one you wish me to know," he answered. "I can never attempt to guess when I feel tired, as I do now."

"Your walk has tired you?"

"I suppose it has. Though I thought how well I felt as I came along."

"The great honor of entertaining you, all by my own self, is delegated to me," cried Charlotte, gayly, dropping another curtsy. "I hope we shall not quarrel, as those dogs are doing."

"The honor of entertaining me!" he repeated, not catching her meaning. "Entertaining me for what?"

"For dinner, sir. Mrs. Verrall has gone to London."

"No!" he exclaimed. He did not believe her.

Charlotte nodded conclusively. "She went at mid-day."

"But what took her away so suddenly?" exclaimed George, in surprise. "She had no intention yesterday of going."

"A freak. Or, impulse,—if you like the word better. Kate rarely acts upon any thing else. She has been expecting Verrall home those

last three days,—but he has neither come nor written,—and this morning, after the post was in, she suddenly declared she'd go to town, and see what was keeping him."

"They may cross each other on the road."

"Of course they may,—and Kate have her journey for her pains. That's nothing to her,—she likes traveling. 'What am I to do with Mr. George Godolphin? Entertain him?' I said to her. 'I suppose you can contrive to do it,' she answered. 'I suppose I could,' I said. 'But, what about it's being proper?' I asked," added Charlotte, with a demure glance at George. "'Oh,' said Kate, 'it's proper enough, poor sick fellow. It would never do to disappoint him.' Therefore, sir, please take care that you behave properly, considering that a young lady is your hostess."

She threw a laughing glance at George; and, sitting down at the table, took a pack of beautifully painted cards from an ivory box, and began that delectable game that the French call "La patience." George watched her from the sofa where he was sitting. A certain thought had darted into his mind. What fit of prudence called it up? Did he think of Charlotte's benefit,—or of his own? Did the recollection of what Cecil had whispered actuate him? There's no telling. It was very far indeed from George Godolphin's intention to make a wife of Charlotte Pain, and he may have deemed it well to avoid all situations where he might compromise himself by a hasty word. Such words are more easily dropped than taken up again. Or, perhaps George, free and careless though he was, reflected that it was not altogether the thing for Charlotte Pain to entertain him alone. With all his faults, George Godolphin was a gentleman,—and Charlotte was not altogether constituted for a gentleman's wife.

"I am glad of it, Charlotte," he remarked. "I shall now have to make excuses to one only, instead of to two. I came to ask Mrs. Verrall to allow

me to break through my engagement."

Charlotte had a knave in her hand, pondering where she could place it. She dropped it in her surprise.

"I must dine at home to-day, Charlotte. An old friend of my father and mother's, Mrs. Briscow, is arriving for dinner. I cannot be absent."

The flush deepened on Charlotte's face. "It is unkind of you!" she resentfully said. "But I knew, before, what your promises are worth."

"Unkind? But, Charlotte, I did not know until this morning that Mrs. Briscow was coming. There's nothing unkind about it."

"It is unkind!" flashed Charlotte. "If you were not unkind, you would not leave me here by myself, to pass a solitary evening, and play at this wretched patience."

"But I am not going to leave you here. I wish to take you back with me to Ashlydyat to dinner. If you will put on your bonnet, we can be walking thither at once."

"You did not come, intending to ask me."

"I did not. I did not know that Mrs. Verrall would be absent. But I ask you now, being alone as you say. And I intend to take you."

"What will Miss Godolphin say?"

"Miss Godolphin will be very happy to see you,"—which little assertion Mr. George knew to contain more of politeness than truth. "Will you get ready, Charlotte. I must be returning."

Charlotte pushed the cards from her in a heap, and came and stood before George Godolphin, turning herself about for his inspection. "Shall I do without further embellishment?" she asked.

"Admirably," gallantly returned George. "Why dress more for Ashlydyat than you would for home?"

Charlotte marched to the glass, and surveyed herself. "Just something in my hair," she said, ringing the bell.

A maid came in by her desire, and fastened some blue and silver flowers in her hair. Charlotte Pain wore her

hair capriciously,—rarely two days alike. To-day it was all strained back from the face,—that most trying of all styles, let the features be ever so pretty. A shawl was thrown over her shoulders, and then she turned to George.

“I am ready now.”

“But your bonnet?” returned that gentleman, who had looked on with laughing eyes at the mysteries of the hair-dressing.

“I shall not put on a bonnet,” she said. “They can bring it to me at Ashlydyat, for returning at night. People won’t meet us,—the road’s not a public road. And if they should meet us,” she added, laughing, “they will rejoice in the opportunity of seeing me abroad like this. It will be food for Prior’s Ash.”

So they started. Charlotte would not take his arm,—she said he must take hers,—that he needed support, and she did not. That, George would not agree to,—and they strolled on, side by side, resting on benches between whiles. George found he had not much to boast of yet, in the way of strength.

CHAPTER XX.

AN INVITATION TO ALL-SOULS’ RECTORY.

“Who’s this coming up?” exclaimed Charlotte, when they had nearly gained Ashlydyat, and were resting for the last time.

George followed the direction of her eyes. Advancing towards Ashlydyat was a lady,—her bright-gray silk dress gleaming in the sun, a light Cashmere shawl folded round her. There was no mistaking the lady-like figure of Mrs. Hastings.

“Don’t you see who it is?” said George.

“I do now. Is she to be one of your dinner-party?”

“Not that I am aware of.”

Mrs. Hastings joined them. She sat down on the bench by George’s

side, affectionately inquiring into his state of health, speaking kindly and truthfully her pleasure at seeing him, so far, well again. Whatever prejudice may have been taken against George Godolphin by the rector of All-Souls’, it did not extend to his wife. She liked him much.

“I am getting on famously,” said George, in a merry tone. “I have promoted myself to one stick: until yesterday I was forced to be embellished with two. You are going to Ashlydyat, Mrs. Hastings?”

“I wish to say a few words to Bessy. We have discovered something not pleasant relating to one of the schools in which the under-mistress is mixed up. A good deal of deceit has been going on in fact. Mr. Hastings said Bessy should hear of it at once,—that she was as much interested in it as we are. So I came up.”

Mrs. Hastings, in speaking, had taken two or three glances at Charlotte’s head. That young lady set herself to explain. Mr. George Godolphin had given her an impromptu invitation to go back with him to dine at Ashlydyat.

Then George explained that he had been engaged to dine at the Folly; but he found on arriving that Mrs. Verrall had departed for London. “My friends are all kind to me, Mrs. Hastings,” he observed. “They insist upon it that the change of a few hours must be of benefit to me, and encumber themselves with the troubles of a creachy invalid.”

“I am sure’s there’s nothing like change and amusement for one growing convalescent,” said Charlotte.

“Will you let us contribute in some little way to it?” asked Mrs. Hastings of George. “If a few hours sojourn in our dull house would be agreeable to you, you know that we should only be too happy for you to try it.”

“I should like it of all things,” cried George, impulsively. “I cannot walk far yet without resting, and it is pleasant to sit a few hours at my walk’s end before I begin to start

back again. I shall soon extend my journeys to Prior's Ash."

"Then come to us the first day that you feel yourself able to get as far. You will always find some of us at home. We will dine at any hour you like, and you shall choose your own dinner."

"A bargain," said George.

They rose to pursue their way to Ashlydyat. Mrs. Hastings offered her arm to George, and he took it with thanks. "He would not take mine," thought Charlotte,—and she flashed an angry glance at him.

The fact was that for some considerable time Charlotte Pain had put Maria Hastings nearly out of her head as regarded her relations to George Godolphin. Whatever cause she may have seen at Broomhead to believe he was attached to Maria, the impression had since faded away. In the spring, before his illness, George had been much more with her than with Maria. This was not entirely George's fault: the rectory did not court him,—Charlotte Pain and the Folly did. A week had now passed since Mr. Verrall's departure for town, when George and his two sticks appeared at the Folly for the first time after his illness; and not a day of that week since but George and Charlotte had met. Altogether her hopes of winning the prize had gone up to enthusiastic heat: and Charlotte believed the greatest prize in the world—taking all his advantages collectively—to be George Godolphin.

George went at once to his sister Janet's chamber. She was in it, making herself ready for dinner, after bringing her aged guest, Mrs. Briscow, from the station. He knocked at the door with his stick, and was told to enter.

Janet was before the glass in her black silk dress, trimmed heavily with crape still. She was putting on her sober cap,—a white one with black ribbons interspersed. Janet Godolphin had taken to wear caps at thirty years of age: her hair, like Thomas's, was thin; and she was not troubled with

cares of making herself appear younger than she was.

"Come in, George," she said, turning to him without any appearance of surprise.

"See how good I am, Janet," he cried, throwing himself wearily into a chair. "I have come back to dine with you."

"I saw you from the window. You have been walking too far!"

"Only to the Folly and back. But I sauntered about looking at the flowers, and that tires one far worse than bearing on steadily."

"Ay. Lie yourself down on that couch at full length, lad. Mrs. Hastings is here, I see. And was that other Charlotte Pain?"

"Yes," replied George, disregarding the injunction to lie down.

"Did she come from the Folly in that guise,—nothing on her head but those flowers? I could see no bonnet even in her hand."

"It is to be sent after her. Janet,"—passing by quickly the other matter,—"she has come to dine with us."

Miss Godolphin turned round in amazement and fixed her eyes reproachfully on George. "To dine with us?—to-day? Have you been asking her?"

"Janet, I could not well help myself. When I got to Lady Godolphin's Folly, I found Charlotte alone,—Mrs. Verrall has departed for town. To break through my engagement there I proposed that Charlotte should come here."

"Nay," said Janet, "your engagement was already broken if Mrs. Verrall was away."

"Not so. Charlotte expected me to remain."

"Herself your sole entertainer?"

"I suppose so."

A severe expression rose to Miss Godolphin's lips, and remained there. "It is most unsuitable,—Charlotte Pain's being here to-day, she resumed. "The changes which have taken place render our meeting with Mrs. Briscow a sad one: no stranger ought to be at table. Least of all, Charlotte Pain.

Her conversation is at times unfeminine."

"How can you say so, Janet?" he involuntarily exclaimed.

"Should she launch into some of her favorite topics, her riding, and her horses, and her dogs, it will sound unfeminine to Mrs. Briscoe's ears. In her young days,—in *my* days also, George, for the matter of that,—these subjects were deemed more suitable to men's lips than to young women's."

"I will tell her that the good lady is of the antediluvian school, and drop her a hint to mind her manners," cried George, with the mocking expression that Janet never liked.

"George, had your mother lived, it would have been a sore day to her, the one that brought the news that you had fixed your mind on Charlotte Pain."

"It was not to my father, at any rate," George could not help saying.

"And was it possible that you did not see how Charlotte Pain played her cards before your father?" resumed Janet. "Not a word that could offend his prejudices as a refined gentleman, did she ever suffer to drop. I saw, if you did not."

"You manage to see a great deal that the rest of us don't, Janet,—or you fancy that you do."

"It is no fancy, lad. I'd not like to discourage a thing that you have set your heart upon,—I'd rather go a mile out of my way than do it: but I stand next door to a mother to you, and I can but warn you that you will repent it if you ever suffer Charlotte Pain to be more to you than she now is."

George rose. "If you'll suffer Charlotte to be one of us to-day with a good grace, Janet, I'll tell you a secret."

"Eh, lad, but I must suffer her. Have not ye brought her here?"

"But with a good grace, Janet."

"It's of little consequence, that," said Janet. "I shall not receive a guest at my table with a frown upon my brow."

"Then now I'll set your mind at rest, Janet. It has never been my

intention to marry Charlotte Pain: and—so far as I believe at present—it never will be."

Janet Godolphin's heart leaped within her. "I'm thankful to hear it!" she said, in a low tone. "Then she's not going with you abroad, George?"

"Scarcely," returned George; and he laughed at the notion as he quitted the room.

The dinner went off pleasantly. Mrs. Briscoe was a charming old lady, although she was of the "antediluvian" school, and Charlotte was on her best behavior, and half fascinated Mrs. Briscoe. George, like a trespassing child, received several hints from Janet that bed might be desirable for him, but he ingeniously ignored them, and sat on. Charlotte's bonnet and an attendant arrived, and Thomas Godolphin put on his hat to see her to the Folly.

"I need not trouble you, Mr. Godolphin. I shall not get run away with."

"I think it will be as well that I should see you do not," said he, smiling.

It was scarcely dark. The clock had not struck ten, and the night was starlight. Thomas Godolphin gave her his arm, and the maid walked behind them.

"Let us take the path by the ash-trees!" Charlotte exclaimed.

"It is farther round."

"Not much farther. I often feel a sort of superstitious hankering to look at the Dark Plain at night; but I feel timid at going thither alone, since the time that I saw something there."

"What did you see?"

"The shadow that people talk of. I *know* I saw it, and you need not smile at me, Mr. Godolphin. This is the turning. Let us go!"

Thus urged,—for Charlotte went that way and pulled him with her,—Thomas Godolphin had no plea for declining; and they shortly emerged from the trees in view of the Dark Plain. Charlotte halted. I am looking for the shadow," she said.

"I do not see any shadow," remarked Thomas Godolphin. And it was now his turn to draw her on,—which he did, when she had apparently satisfied herself. There was no appearance of any shadow,—of any thing unusual. The arch and the gorse-bushes were tolerably visible in the starlight: nothing else. Thomas drew her on, the smile, which looked like an incredulous one, still hovering on his lips.

"I suppose it will not do for me to ask you in, as there's nobody at home," said Charlotte, with one of her lapses into freedom, when they arrived at the Folly.

"Thank you. I cannot stay to-night."

He shook hands with her and turned away. Charlotte stood for a few moments, and then turned on her heel and entered the hall. The first thing that caught her notice was a hat; next a traveling-coat. They had not been there when she left that afternoon.

"Then Verrall's back!" she mentally exclaimed.

Hasting into the dining-room, she saw, seated at a table, drinking brandy-and-water, nor Mr. Verrall, but Rodolf Pain.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Charlotte, with more of surprise in her tone than satisfaction, "have you come?"

"Come to find an empty house," rejoined Mr. Pain. "Where's Mrs. Verrall? They tell me she is gone to London."

"She is," replied Charlotte. "Verrall neither came back nor wrote; she got a restless fit upon her, and started off this morning to him."

"Verrall won't thank her," observed Mr. Pain. "He is up to his eyes in business."

"Good or bad business?" asked Charlotte.

"Both. We have got into a mess, and Verrall's not yet out of it."

"Through what? Through whom?" she questioned.

Rodolf Pain gave his shoulders an upward jerk, as if he had been a Frenchman. "It need not trouble you, Charlotte."

"Some one came down here from London a week ago,—a Mr. Appleby. Is it through him? Verrall seemed strangely put out at his coming."

Mr. Pain nodded his head. "They were such idiots in the office as to give Appleby the address here. I have seen Verrall in a tolerable passion once or twice in my life; but I never saw him in such a one as he went into when he came up. They'll not forget it in a hurry. He lays the blame on me, remotely; says I must have left a letter about with the address on it. I know I have done nothing of the sort."

"But what is it, Rodolf? Any thing very bad?"

"Bad enough. But it can be remedied. Let Verrall alone for getting out of pits. I wish, though, we had never set eyes on that fellow, Appleby!"

"Tell me about it, Rodolf."

Mr. Rodolf declined. "You could do no good," said he, "and business is not fitted for ladies' ears."

"I don't care to know it," said Charlotte. "It's no concern of mine: but, somehow, that man Appleby interested me. As to business not being fitted for my ears, I should make a better hand at business than some of you men make."

"Upon my word I think you would, Charlotte. I have often said it. But you are one in a thousand."

"Have you had any thing to eat since you came in?"

"They brought me some supper. It has just gone away."

"I had better inquire whether there's a room ready?" she remarked, moving towards the bell.

"It's all done, Charlotte. I have told them I have come to stay. Just sit down, and let me talk to you."

"Shall you stay long?"

"I can't tell till I hear from Verrall to-morrow. I may be leaving again to-morrow night, or I may be here for interminable weeks. The office is to be clear of Mr. Verrall just now, do you understand?"

Charlotte apparently did under-

stand. She took her seat in a chair near, listlessly enough. Something in her manner would have told an accurate observer that she could very well have dispensed with the company of Rodolf Pain. He, however, saw nothing of that. He took his cigar-case from his pocket, selected a cigar, and then, by way of sport, held the case out to Charlotte.

"Will you take one?"

For answer, she dashed it out of his hand half way across the room. And she did it in anger, too.

"How unequal you are!" he exclaimed, as he rose to pick up his property. "There are times when you can take a joke pleasantly, and laugh at it."

He sat down again, lighted his cigar, and smoked a few minutes in silence. Then he turned to her. "Don't you think it is time, Charlotte, that you and I brought ourselves to an anchor?"

"No, I don't," she bluntly answered.

"But I say it is," he resumed.

"And I mean it to be done."

"You mean!"

Something in the tone aroused him, and he gazed at her with surprise. "You are not going from your promise, Charlotte!"

"I don't remember that I made any distinct promise," said she.

Mr. Rodolf Pain grew heated. "You know that you did, Charlotte. You know that you engaged yourself irrevocably to me——"

"Irrevocably!" she slightly interrupted. "How you misappropriate words!"

"It was as irrevocable as a promise can be. Have you not led me on, this twelvemonth past, believing month after month that you would be my wife the next? And, month after month, you have put me off upon the most frivolous pretexts!"

He rose as he spoke, drew up his little figure to its utmost height in his excitement, and pushed back his light hair from his small insignificant face, —a face that betrayed not too much

strength of any sort, physical, moral, or intellectual. Charlotte retained unbroken calmness.

"Rodolf, I don't think it would do," she said, with an air of reasoning candor. "I have thought it over and over, and that's why I have put you off. It is not well that we should all be so closely connected together. Better get new ties, that will shelter us, in case a——"

"A what?" asked Rodolf Pain, his eyes strained on Charlotte through their very light lashes.

"In case a smash comes. That—if we are all in the same boat—would ruin us all. Better that you and I should form other connections."

"You are talking great nonsense," he angrily said. "A smash!—to us! Can't you trust Verrall better than that?"

"Why, you say that, even at this present moment——"

"You are wrong, Charlotte," he vehemently interrupted; "you misunderstood me entirely. Things go wrong in business temporarily; they must do so in business of all sorts; but they right themselves again. Why! do you know what Verrall made last year?"

"A great deal."

"My little petty share was two thousand pounds: and that is as a drop of water to the ocean, compared with his. Whatever has put you upon these foolish fancies?"

"Prudence," returned Charlotte.

"I don't believe it," was the plain answer. "You are trying to blind me. You are laying yourself out for higher game, and, to shut my eyes, and gain time to see if you can play it out, you concoct a story of 'prudence' to me. It's one or the other of those Godolphins."

"The Godolphins!" mockingly repeated Charlotte. "You are clever! The one will never marry as long as the world lasts; the other's dead."

"Dead!" echoed Rodolf Pain.

"As good as dead. He's like a ghost, and he is being sent off for au

interminable period to some warmer climate. How ridiculous you are, Rodolf!"

"Charlotte, I'll take care of ways and means. I'll take care of you and your interests. Only fix the time when you will be mine."

"Then I won't, Rodolf. I don't care to marry yet awhile. I'll see about it when the next hunting-season shall be over."

Rodolf Pain opened his eyes. "The hunting-season!" he cried. "What has that to do with it?"

"Were you my husband, you would be forbidding me to hunt; you don't like my doing it now. So, for the present, I'll remain the mistress of my own actions."

"Another lame excuse," he said, knitting his brow. "You will take very good care always to remain entire mistress of your own actions, whether married or single."

Charlotte laughed, a ringing laugh of power. It spoke significantly enough to Mr. Rodolf Pain. He would have renewed the discussion, but she peremptorily declined, and shaking hands with him, wished him good-night.

CHAPTER XXI.

A REVELATION TO ALL SOULS' RECTOR.

GEORGE GODOLPHIN was not long in availing himself of the invitation to All Souls' rectory. The very day after it was given, he was on his way to it. He started with his stick; made one halt in a shop on his road, and arrived about twelve o'clock.

Not a soul was at home but Maria. Mrs. Hastings, who had not expected him for some days,—for she did not suppose his strength would allow him to get so far yet,—had gone out with Grace. Mr. Hastings was in the church and Maria was alone.

She sat in that one pleasant room of the house,—the long room looking

to the lawn and the flower-beds. She looked so pretty, so refined, so quiet in her simple dress of white muslin spotted with violet, as she pursued her employment,—that of drawing, never suspecting how she was going to be interrupted.

The door of the porch stood open, as it often did in summer, and George Godolphin entered without the ceremony of knocking. The hall was well matted, and Maria did not hear him cross it. A slight tap at the room door.

"Come in," said Maria, supposing it to be one of the servants.

He came in and stood in the doorway, smiling down upon her. So shadowy, so thin! his face utterly pale, his dark blue eyes unnaturally large, his wavy hair damp with the exertion of walking. Maria's heart stood still. She rose from her seat, unable to speak, the color going and coming in her transparent skin; and when she quietly moved forward to welcome him, her heart found its action again, and bounded on in tumultuous beats. The very intensity of her emotion caused her demeanor to be almost unnaturally still.

"Are you glad to see me, Maria?"

It was the first time they had met since his illness; the first time for more than four months,—all that while separated; all that while fearing that he was about to be removed by death! As he touched Maria, her emotion broke forth: she burst into tears: and surely it may be excused to her.

He was scarcely less agitated. He clasped her tenderly to him, and kissed the tears from her face, his own eyelashes glistening. There was no great harm in it after all; for, that each looked forward to the hope of being bound together at no great distance of time by nearer and dearer ties, was indisputable. At least, no harm would have come of it, if— Look at the window.

They did. And there they saw the awful face of the rector glaring in upon them, and by its side,—the more

awful of the two,—that of Charlotte Pain.

Why had she followed George Godolphin to the rectory? Was she determined not to allow him a single chance to escape her? She, bearing in remembrance the compact with Mrs. Hastings, had watched George Godolphin's movements that morning from the windows of the Folly; had watched the road leading from Ashlydyat to Prior's Ash. She saw George and his stick go tottering down it; and by-and-by she put on her things and went out too, imperatively declining the escort of Mr. Rodolf Pain.

Her intention was to make a call at the rectory,—all unconscious, of course, that she should find Mr. George Godolphin there. By dint of a little by-play with Mrs. Hastings,—who was too thoroughly a lady to be given to suspicion,—she might get an invitation to remain also for the day. With these very laudable intentions Charlotte arrived opposite All Souls' church, where she caught sight of the Reverend Mr. Hastings emerging from its door. She crossed the churchyard, and accosted him.

"Is Mrs. Hastings at home, do you know? I am going to call upon her."

Now, Charlotte was no great favorite of that gentleman's; nevertheless, being a gentleman, he answered her cordially, as he shook her by the hand. He believed Mrs. Hastings and Grace were out, he said, but Maria was at home.

"I am moped to death!" exclaimed Charlotte, as she and Mr. Hastings entered the private gate to the rectory-garden. Mrs. Verrall is gone to London, and there am I! I came out intending to go the round of the town till I could find some Samaritans or other who would take compassion on me, and let me stay an hour or two with them."

Mr. Hastings gave no particular reply. He did not make for the side-door of the house,—his usual entrance from the church,—but turned towards the front, that he might usher in Charlotte in state. This took them by the

windows of the drawing-room: and there they saw—what they did see: Mr. Hastings, in his astonishment, halted: Charlotte halted also, as you may be very sure.

George was the first to see them, and a word of anger broke from his lips. Maria hastily raised her head from its resting-place,—and felt almost as if she should die. To be seen thus by Charlotte Pain was bad enough: but by her strict father! Her face grew white.

George Godolphin saw the signs: "My darling, only be calm! Leave all to me."

That an explanation was forced upon him somewhat prematurely, was undoubted. But it was no unwelcome explanation. Nay, in the second moment, he was deeming it the very best thing that could have happened; for certain visions of taking Maria with him into exile had crossed his brain latterly. He would try hard now to get them realized. It is true he would have preferred, all things considered, not to speak before Miss Charlotte Pain; but necessity, as you know, has no law.

The rector came in at the door,—Charlotte following. "Mr. George Godolphin!" he frigidly began; but George interrupted what he would have further said.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said, taking a step forward; "allow me one word of explanation before you cast blame to me. I was about asking your daughter to be my wife. Will you give her to me?"

Mr. Hastings looked like a man confounded. That he was intensely surprised at the words was evident: perhaps he half doubted whether Mr. George Godolphin was playing with him. He cast a severe glance at Maria. George had taken her on his arm, and she stood there before him, her head drooping, her eyelashes resting on her white cheek. As for Charlotte Pain?—well, you should have seen her.

Ah no, there was no deception: George was in true earnest, and Mr.

Hastings saw that he was. His eyes were fixed beseechingly on those of Mr. Hastings, and emotion had brought the crimson hectic to his wasted cheek.

"Do not blame Maria, sir," he resumed. "She is innocent of all offence, and dutiful as innocent. Were you to interpose your veto between us, and deny her to me, I know that she would obey you, even though the struggle killed her. Mr. Hastings, we have loved each other for some time past: and I should have spoken to you before, but for my illness intervening. Will you give her to me at once, and let her share my exile?"

Mr. Hastings had no insuperable objection to George Godolphin. That report had given to Mr. George credit for bushels and bushels of wild oats, which he would have to sow, was certain: but in this respect he was no worse than many others, and marriage is supposed to be a cure for youthful follies. Mr. Hastings had once suspected that Maria was acquiring more liking for George than was good for her: hence his repulsion of George; for he believed that he was destined for Charlotte Pain. Even now, he could not comprehend how it was, and the prominent feeling of his mind was surprised perplexity.

"I love her as my own life, sir. I will strive to render her happy."

"I cannot understand it," said Mr. Hastings, dropping his tone of anger. "I was under the impression,—I beg your pardon, Miss Pain," turning to her,—but I was under the impression that you were engaged to Mr. George Godolphin."

If ever Charlotte Pain had need to fight for composure, she had dire need then. Her hopes were suddenly hurled to the ground, and she had the cruel mortification of hearing him whom she best loved, reject and spurn her for a long-hated rival. If her love for George Godolphin was not very deep or refined,—and it was neither the one nor the other,—she did love him after a fashion; better, at any rate, than she loved anybody else. The *position* she would take up as

George Godolphin's wife was hurled from her; and perhaps Miss Charlotte cared for that more than she did for George himself. The Verralls and their appearance of wealth were all very well in their places,—as George had said by the dogs,—but what were they compared to the ancient Godolphins? There are moments which drive a woman to the verge of madness, and Charlotte was so driven now. Any thing like control of temper was quite beyond her: and malvolence entered her heart.

"I engaged to Mr. George Godolphin!" she echoed, taking up the rector's words in a shrieking tone, which she could not have helped had her life depended on it. "Engaged to a married man? Thank you, Mr. Hastings."

"A married man!" repeated the puzzled rector,—whilst George turned his questioning eyes upon her.

"Yes, a married man," she continued, her throat heaving, her breath panting. "They may have chosen to hoodwink you, to blind you, Mr. Hastings, but I saw what I saw. When your daughter—innocent Miss Maria, there—came home from Scotland, she had been married to George Godolphin. A false priest, a sort of Gretna-Green man, had married them: and I saw it done. I engaged to George Godolphin!"

Charlotte Pain knew that the words were false,—called up to gratify her rage in that angry moment. Scarcely any thing else that she could conjure up would so have told upon the rector. In his straightforward right doing, to his practical mind of sense, a clandestine marriage appeared one of the cardinal sins. His face turned pale, and his eye flashed as he grasped Maria's shoulder.

"Girl! is this so?"

"Oh, papa, no!" returned Maria, with streaming eyes. "It is a wicked untruth. Charlotte! to tell such an untruth is wicked. Papa, I affirm to you—"

"Hush, my dearest," interposed George, "let me deal with this. Mr. Hastings, it is a thing that you need

scarcely *ask* of Maria,—whether it is true, or untrue. Is she one, think you, to enter into a clandestine marriage? You know better, sir. Nothing has ever passed between myself and Maria more than has passed before you this day. Were I base enough to solicit her to enter into one,—and you need not think of *me* a whit better than you choose,—Maria would only repulse me. Miss Pain, will you unsay your words?"

For answer, Miss Pain entered into a scornful account of Sandy Bray and his doings. She reiterated her assertion. She declared that she saw Maria and George standing before him, their hands clasped together in the attitude of a couple being married, when she entered suddenly with a message from Lady Godolphin, and she finished up by saying she had always believed since that they were married, only it had been no business of hers to proclaim it. The rector's brow grew moist again, and George Godolphin looked significantly at Charlotte. He spoke significantly, too.

"No, you have not thought it, Charlotte." And he turned and related to Mr. Hastings as much as he knew of Sandy Bray, emphatically repeating his denial. "If you will take a moment's thought, sir, you may be convinced that the truth lies with me. I am beseeching you to give Maria to me; I crave it of you as the greatest boon that I can ask in life. I know not whether you will accede to my petition: but what argument could I urge, to induce it, with half the force as the one that she was already my wife in secret? Nay, were she indeed my wife in secret, why should I care for the ceremony to be repeated? I should only have to confess it, and throw myself and Maria upon your forgiveness. I heartily wish it had been so!"

"You are bold, Mr. George Godolphin!"

"Bold, sir?" returned George, with emotion. "Not more bold than I ought to be. I don't care to defend myself, but I do care to defend Maria.

Give her to me, Mr. Hastings! give her to me!" he added, changing his tone to one of tender entreaty; "I will defend her through life with my best blood."

Mr. Hastings looked at him; he looked at the tearful, but certainly not guilty countenance of his daughter; he turned and looked at the furious one of Charlotte Pain. "Step this way," he said to George Godolphin. "I would speak to you alone."

He took him to another room and shut the door. "I want the truth," he said, "upon one or two points——"

"Mr. Hastings," said George, drawing himself up, "I have told you nothing but the truth upon all points."

"Were you never engaged to Charlotte Pain?" proceeded Mr. Hastings, taking no notice of the interruption.

"Never. I never sought or wished to be."

"Then what did your good father, Sir George, mean when he alluded to it the night he was dying? He asked if you and Charlotte were married yet: and you replied, 'Plenty of time for that.'"

"I said it merely in answer to his words: it was not an hour for dissent or explanation. He was not conscious of what he said."

"Had you expressed to him any particular liking for Charlotte Pain?"

"I had not at any time. Sir George believed Miss Pain had a large fortune, and he recommended me more than once to think of her and it. He said she was a handsome girl, and none the worse for possessing a fortune. He had heard she would have thirty thousand pounds. I used to laugh it off. I cared for Maria too much to cast a thought to Charlotte Pain. That is the whole truth, Mr. Hastings, on my honor."

"Would he have objected to Maria?"

"To Maria I am certain he would not have objected. To her want of fortune he might. But that is a thing that only concerns myself. I do not require fortune in my wife, and I do

not seek it. You will give her to me, Mr. Hastings. You will dispense with unnecessary ceremony, and let her go abroad with me!" he urged. "She will do me more good than all else."

"I will give you no promise of any sort, Mr. George Godolphin. As to taking her abroad with you,—it is absurd to think of that. And no daughter of mine shall enter a family where she is not sure of a hearty welcome. I must first know the sentiments of yours."

George looked radiant. "Mr. Hastings, if they heartily welcome Maria, will you allow me to welcome her?"

"Possibly I will."

"Then it is an affair decided. Janet will be relieved of a nightmare, and Maria is, I believe, Thomas's prime favorite in all the world now Ethel's gone."

"Of what nightmare will it relieve Miss Godolphin?" inquired the rector.

A smile crossed George's lips. "She, like you, has been fearing that I intended to connect myself with Charlotte Pain. Only yesterday I assured Janet she was mistaken, but I scarcely think she put entire faith in me. She does not like Miss Pain."

"Do you think you have pursued a wise course in giving cause for this talk relative to Miss Pain?"

"I have not given cause to Miss Pain herself, Mr. Hastings," replied George, warmly. "I am convinced that she has known in her heart of my attachment to Maria. As to whiling away a few hours with her occasionally in idle talk, it is a pastime that Charlotte Pain is given to favor."

And myself also, Mr. George might have added.

They left the room together. A servant came up to Mr. Hastings as he was crossing the hall, and said an applicant at the door craved speech of him. The rector turned to it, and George entered the drawing-room alone.

Maria stood, pale, anxious, excited, leaning against a corner of the window, half-shrouded by the muslin curtains. She scarcely dared look up when George entered. It was not his gaze

that she dreaded to meet, but that of Mr. Hastings. To anger or displease her father was wormwood to Maria.

George cast a glance round the room. "Where's Charlotte Pain?" he asked.

"She is gone," was Maria's answer. "Oh, George," clasping her hands and lifting to him her streaming eyes, "it was cruel of her to say what she did?"

"I could give it a better name than that, Maria. Never mind: we can afford to be generous to-day."

"Is papa fully convinced that—that I do not deserve blame?"

"He was convinced of that before he quitted this room. You are to be mine, Maria," he softly added in a whisper. "And very shortly. I must take you abroad with me."

She stood before him, not daring to look up now,—shrinking from his ardent gaze, the crimson mantling in her pure cheek.

"Mr. Hastings demurs at the haste, calling it absurd," continued George, his tone changing to one of gayety: "but if you will consent to waive ceremony, surely he may. Which would be more absurd, Maria?—your marrying without the three-months' preparation of millinery, deemed necessary by fashion, or my going away alone for an indefinite period perhaps to die?"

"Not to die, George!" she involuntarily answered in a tone of painful beseeching, as if he held the fiat of life or death in his own hands. "But about the haste, I don't know,—I heard you thought of departing soon."

"I ought to be away in a fortnight's time."

That startled her. "A fortnight's time!" she echoed in a voice of alarm. "Then it could not be. What would Prior's Ash say?"

"Maria," he gravely answered, "some nine months ago, when Sarah Ann Grame was seized with the fever, my brother, alarmed for Ethel's safety, would have married her hastily, so that he might have the right to remove her from danger. Ethel's an-

swer to him was 'What would Prior's Ash say?'—as you have now answered me. Thomas bowed to it: he suffered the world's arrogated notions to reign paramount,—and he lost Ethel. What value do you suppose *he* sets now upon the opinions of Prior's Ash? The cases may not be precisely parallel, but they are sufficiently so to decide me. If I go away from home, I take you: if I may not take you, I do not go. And now, my darling, I will say farewell to you for the present."

She was surprised. She thought he had come to stay for some hours.

"Yes," he replied; "but affairs have changed since I entered. Until they shall be more definitely settled, Mr. Hastings will not care that I remain his guest."

He bent to kiss her. Not in the stolen manner he had been accustomed to, but quite gravely,—turning her shy face to his as if it were his legal province so to do. "A little while, young lady," he saucily whispered, "and you'll be giving me kiss for kiss."

Mr. Hastings was in the porch still, holding a colloquy with ill-doing and troublesome Mrs. Bond. George held out his hand as he passed.

"You have not rested yourself," said the rector.

"I shall get back as far as the bank and rest there," replied George. "I presume, sir, that you intend to see my brother?"

"And also Miss Godolphin," curtly said the rector.

His eyes followed George down the path to the gate, as he and his stick moved unsteadily along. "Marry now!" mentally cried Mr. Hastings, his brow contracting: "he looks more fit to take to his bed, and keep it. Now, Mrs. Bond," he added, aloud, "let me hear the conclusion of this tale."

George took his way to the bank. He had not passed it in coming, having cut across from Ashlydyat by a nearer way at the back of the town. He took them by surprise. Mr. Crosse was out, but the clerks were warm in their congratulations: they had not

believed him yet equal to the exertion.

"You look very tired," said Thomas, when they were alone in the bank parlor.

"I feel fagged to death," was George's answer. "I shall get you to send out for a fly for me, and go home in that. Thomas," he continued, plunging into his business abruptly, "I expect you will have an application made to you, regarding me."

"In what way?" quietly asked Thomas.

"Well—it is not exactly a certificate of character that's required," returned George, with a smile. "I—I am thinking of getting married. Will you approve?"

"I have no right to disapprove," said Thomas, in a kind, grave tone. "You are your own master; free to act as you shall judge best. I only hope, George, that you will, in choosing, consider your future happiness."

"Has it never occurred to you that I had chosen?"

"I used to think at times that you had chosen, or felt inclined to choose, Maria Hastings."

"Right," said George. I have been speaking to Mr. Hastings, and it appears to have taken him entirely by surprise. He would give me no answer until he should have ascertained whether the alliance would be agreeable to you and Janet. He is a man of crotchets, you know. So I expect he will be coming to you, Thomas."

Thomas Godolphin's eyes lighted up with pleasure. "He shall receive my hearty approval," he said, warmly. "George,"—changing his tone to sadness,—"in the days gone by, I thought there were two young beings superior to the rest of the world,—Ethel and Maria."

"I said so to Mr. Hastings. I conclude he fears that Maria's want of fortune would render her unpalatable to my family," remarked George.

"Certainly not to me. Ethel, whom I chose, had even less. If you think well to dispense with fortune in your wife, George, we have no right to

cavil at it. I am glad that you have chosen Maria Hastings."

But there was Janet to come yet. George went home in the fly, and threw himself on the first sofa he could find. Janet, full of concern, came to him.

"I said you were attempting too much, George!" she cried: "but you never will listen to me."

"I'm sure, Janet, I listen to you dutifully. I am come home to consult you now," he added, a little spirit of mischief dancing in his gay blue eyes; "it is not fatigue or illness that has brought me. Janet, I am going to be married."

Janet Godolphin's pulses beat more quickly. She sat down and folded her hands with a gesture of pain. "I knew it would be so. You need not have tried to deceive me yesterday, lad."

"But the young lady's friends refuse her to me, unless my family openly sanction and approve of the match," went on George. "You'll be cordial over it, won't you, Janet?"

"No, lad. I cannot forbid it; I have no authority; but, sanction it, I never will. What has put it into your head to marry in this haste? You, with one foot in the grave, as may be said, and one out of it!"

"Well, you see, Janet, you won't trust me abroad without somebody to look after me," he slowly answered, as if he were arguing some momentous question. "You say you can't go, and Bessy can't go, and Cecil may not, and I say I won't have Margery. What was I to do but marry? I cannot take a young lady, you know, without first marrying her."

Janet Godolphin's grave eyes were fixed on vacancy, and her thin lips drawn in to pressure. She did not answer.

"Thomas heartily approves," he continued. "I have been with him."

"Thomas must do as he likes," said Janet. "But, unless you have unwittingly misunderstood him, George, you are telling me a deliberate false-

hood. He will never approve of your marrying Charlotte Pain."

"Charlotte Pain!" repeated George, with an air of as much surprise as if it were genuine, "who was talking about Charlotte Pain? What put her in your head?"

Janet's face flushed. "Were you not talking of Charlotte Pain?"

"Not I," said George. "In spite of the compliments you pay my truthfulness, Janet, I meant what I said to you yesterday,—that I did not intend to make her my wife. I am speaking of Maria Hastings."

"Eh, lad, but that's good news!"

George burst into a laugh. "What green geese you must all have been, Janet! Had you used your eyes, you might have detected, this long while past, that my choice was fixed on Maria. But the rector doubts whether you will approve. He will not promise her to me until he has your sanction."

"I'll put my shawl on and go down at once to the rectory, and tell him that we all love Maria," said Janet, more impulsively than was common with her: but in truth she had been relieved from a great fear. There was something about Charlotte Pain that frightened sedate Janet. Compared with her, Maria Hastings appeared every thing that was desirable as a wife for George. Her want of fortune, her want of position,—which was certainly not equal to that of the Godolphins,—were lost sight of.

"I could do with some broth, Janet," cried out George, as she was leaving the room: "I have had nothing since breakfast."

"To be sure. I am growing forgetful. Margery shall wait upon you, my dear. But, to go down to the rectory without delay, is a courtesy due from me."

So, no impediment was placed upon the marriage. Neither was any impediment placed upon its immediate celebration,—the rector permitting himself to be persuaded into allowing it. Whether he would have done so but for that absurd fable of the private

marriage, may be doubtful. Charlotte Pain contrived that the story should become public property. What with that—which, however, nobody believed—and what with the present real marriage, Prior's Ash had a dainty dish of gossip served up to it.

Three weeks subsequent to the day when it was broached to the rector, George Godolphin and Maria stood before that rector, in the Church of All Souls'. George did not appear very ill now: he was not so shadowy, his fine complexion had come again, and stick the second was discarded. Maria was beautiful. Her soft bridal robes floated around her, her color went and came, as she glanced shyly up at George Godolphin,—a handsome couple; one that is seldom seen.

It was quite a private marriage—so to speak; but few guests being present, and they relatives, or very close friends. Lady Godolphin had responded to the invitation (which Janet had not expected her to do) and was the guest of Ashlydyat. Very superb was she in silks and jewels this day. Old Mrs. Briscow had also remained for it. Mr. Crosse was present, and some relatives of the Hastings family: and Grace and Cecil were bridesmaids. The rector joined their hands, speaking the necessary words slowly and emphatically; words that bound them to each other till death.

Then came the breakfast at the rectory, and then the going away. The carriage waited at the gate. The rector laid his hand upon George Godolphin's arm as he was going out to it, and addressed him in a low tone:

"I have confided her to you in entire trust. You will cherish her in all love and honor?"

"Always!" emphatically pronounced George, grasping the rector's hand. "You shall never have cause to repent the gift."

Thomas Godolphin was placing Maria in the carriage. She looked out through her tears, nodding her last adieus. George took his place beside her, and the post-boys

started on the first stage towards Dover.

As they were passing the house of Lady Sarah Grame, by which their route lay, that lady herself sat at the window, as did also Sarah Anne,—both on the tiptoe of curiosity, beyond all doubt. Between them, laughing and talking with a gay air, and looking out, stood Charlotte Pain. Maria gave vent to an involuntary exclamation.

Another moment, and they had whirled by, beyond view. George dreamt impulsively to Maria and drew her close to him. "Thank God! thank God!" he earnestly said.

"For what?" she murmured.

"That *you* are mine. Maria, I dreamt last night that I had married Charlotte Pain, and that you were dying. The dream has been haunting me all day. I can laugh at it now. Thank God!"

CHAPTER XXII.

CHARLOTTE'S BARGAIN.

IN the gayest and lightest room of Lady Godolphin's Folly, its windows open to the green slopes, the flowered parterres, to the magnificent prospect which swept the horizon in the distance, was Mrs. Verrall. She lay back in a fauteuil, in the idle, vain, listless manner favored by her; toying with the ribbons of her tasty dress, with the cluster of shining trifles on her watch-chain, with her gossamer handkerchief, its lace so fine in texture that unobservant eyes could not tell where the cambric ended and that began, with her fan which lay beside her, tapping her pretty foot upon an ottoman in some impatience; there she sat, displaying her charms in conscious vanity, and waiting for any callers, idle and vain as herself, who might arrive to admire those charms.

At a distance, in another fauteuil, listless and impatient also, sat Rodolf

"They came driving by, in the carriage, and we had full view."

This somewhat aroused Mrs. Verrall from her listlessness. "They have started, then! How did she look, Charlotte?"

"Look!" cried Charlotte. "She looked as she usually looks, for all I saw. He had hectic cheeks; I could see that. Mr. George must take care of himself yet, I fancy."

"How was Mrs. George dressed?" questioned Mrs. Verrall again.

"Could I see?—seated low in the carriage, as she was, and leaning back in it!" retorted Charlotte. "She wore a white bonnet and veil, and that's all I can tell. Margery and Pierce were with them. I say, Kate, don't you think Lady Sarah must *feel* this day? A few months back, and it was her daughter who was on the point of marriage with a Godolphin. But she did not seem to think of it. She'd give her head for a daughter of hers to wed a Godolphin still."

Mrs. Verrall raised her eyes to Charlotte's with an expression of simple astonishment. The remark mystified her. Mrs. Verrall could boast little depth of any sort, and never saw half so far as Charlotte did. Charlotte resumed:

"I saw; I know; I have seen and known ever since Ethel died. My lady would like Sarah Anne to take Ethel's place with Thomas Godolphin."

"I can hardly believe that, Charlotte."

"Disbelieve it, then," equably responded Charlotte, as she passed out to the terrace and began to call to her dogs. They came noisily up in answer, and Charlotte disappeared with them.

And Mr. Rodolf Pain, sitting there in his embroidered chair, with a swelling heart, remarked that Charlotte had not vouchsafed the smallest notice to him. "I'd not stop another hour," he murmured to himself, "only that my going back would put up Verrall: and—and it might not do."

Very intense was that gentleman's

surprise to see, not two minutes after, Mr. Verrall himself enter the room by the window. Mrs. Verrall gave a little shriek of astonishment; and the new-comer, throwing his summer-overcoat upon a chair, shook hands with his wife and gave her a kiss. Plenty of dust was mingled with his yellow whiskers and his moustache.

"I came third-class most of the way," explained Mr. Verrall, as an apology for the dust. "The first-class carriage was stuffing hot, and there was no getting a smoke in it. We had a troublesome guard: the fellow excused himself by saying one of the directors was in the train."

"I have been all this while rubbing my eyes to find out whether they are deceiving me," cried Rodolf Pain. "Who was to dream of seeing you here to-day, sir?"

"I should think you expected to see me before, Rodolf," was Mr. Verrall's answer.

"Well, so I did. But it seemed to be put off so long, that I am surprised to see you now. Is—is all straight?"

"Quite straight," replied Mr. Verrall; "after an overwhelming amount of bother. You are going up to-day, Pain."

"And not sorry to hear it, either," cried Rodolf Pain, with emphasis. "I am sick of having nothing to do. Is Appleby settled?" he added, dropping his voice.

Mr. Verrall gave a nod; and, drawing Rodolf Pain to a far window, stood there talking to him for some minutes in a undertone. Mrs. Verrall, who never concerned herself with matters of business, and never would listen to them, went out on the terrace, a pale pink parasol, with its white fringe, held between her face and the sun. While thus standing, the distant bells of All Souls', which had been ringing occasional peals throughout the day, smote faintly upon her ear. She went in-doors again.

"Verrall," said she, "if you come out here you can hear the bells. Do you know what they are ringing for?"

"What bells? Why should I hear

them?" inquired Mr. Verrall, turning from Rodolf Pain.

"They are ringing for George Godolphin's wedding. He has been married to-day."

The information appeared,—as Rodolf Pain would have expressed it, had he given utterance to his sentiments,—to strike Mr. Verrall all of a heap. "George Godolphin married to-day!" he repeated, in profound astonishment, remembering the creachy state George had been in when he had quitted Prior's Ash, three weeks before. "Married or buried, do you mean?"

Mrs. Verrall laughed. "Oh, he has got well from his illness; or nearly well," she said. "The bells would toll muffled peals, if he were buried, Verrall, Verrall, like they did for Sir George."

"And whom has he married?" continued Mr. Verrall, not in the least overgetting his astonishment.

"Maria Hastings."

Mr. Verrall stroked his yellow moustache,—a somewhat recent appendage to his beauty. He was by no means a demonstrative man,—except on rare occasions,—and though the tidings evidently made marked impression on him, he said nothing. "Is Charlotte at the wedding?" he casually asked.

"No strangers were invited," replied Mrs. Verrall. "Lady Godolphin came for it, and is staying at Ashlydyat. She has put off her weeds for to-day, and appears in colors,—glad enough, I know, of the excuse for doing so."

"Where is Charlotte?" resumed Mr. Verrall.

He happened to look at Rodolf Pain as he spoke, and the latter answered, pointing towards some trees on the right.

"She went down there with her dogs. I'll go and find her."

Mr. Verrall watched him away and then turned to his wife,—speaking, however, impassively still.

"You say he has married Maria Hastings? How came Char-

lotte to let him slip through her fingers?"

"Because she could not help it, I suppose," replied Mrs. Verrall, shrugging her pretty shoulders. "I never thought Charlotte had any chance with George Godolphin, Maria Hastings being in the way. Had Charlotte been first in the field, it might have made all the difference. He had fallen in love with Maria Hastings before he ever saw Charlotte."

Mr. Verrall superciliously drew down his lips at the corners. "Don't talk about a man's 'falling in love,' Kate. Girls fall in love,—men know better. Charlotte has played her cards badly," he added, with some emphasis.

"I don't know," said Mrs. Verrall. "That Charlotte would play them to the best of her ability, there's little doubt: but, as I say, she had no chance from the first. I think George did love Maria Hastings. I'm sure they have been together enough, he and Charlotte, and they have flirted enough; but, as to caring for Charlotte, I don't believe George cared for her any more than he cared for me. They have gone abroad for the winter,—will be away six months, or more."

"I am sorry for that," quietly remarked Mr. Verrall. "I was in hopes to have made some use of Mr. George Godolphin."

"Use?" cried Mrs. Verrall. "What use?"

"Oh, nothing," carelessly replied Mr. Verrall. "A little matter of business that I was going to propose to him."

"Won't it do when he comes home?"

"I dare say it may," said Mr. Verrall.

Mr. Rodolf Pain had walked to the right, and plunged amidst the grove of trees in search of Charlotte. He was not long in finding her. The noise made by her dogs was sufficient guide. In one respect Charlotte Pain was better off than her sister, Mrs. Verrall: she found more resources for killing time. Charlotte had no greater taste for books than Mrs. Verrall had:

if she took one up, it was only to fling it down again: she did not draw, she did not work. For some reasons of her own, Charlotte kept an ornamental piece of work in hand, which never got finished. It is speaking metaphorically, you know, to say "in hand." Had she kept it literally in hand it might have progressed better. Once in a way, upon the most rare occasions, it was taken up, and a couple of stitches done to it; and then, like the book, flung down again. Charlotte played well; nay, brilliantly: but she never played to amuse herself, or for the love of music: always for display. The resources which Charlotte possessed above Mrs. Verrall lay in her horsemanship and her dogs. Mrs. Verrall could ride, and sometimes did; but it was always in a decorous manner. She did not gallop, helter-skelter, across country, as Charlotte did, with half a dozen cavaliers barely keeping up with her; she took no pleasure in horses for themselves, and she would as soon have entered a pigsty as a stable. With all Mrs. Verrall's vanity, and her not overstrong intellect, she possessed more of the innate refinement of the gentlewoman than did Charlotte.

Look at Charlotte now: as Rodolf Pain,—a cigar, which he has just lighted, between his lips, and his hands in his pockets,—approaches her. She is standing on a garden-bench with the King Charley in her arms: the other two dogs she had set on to fight at her feet, their muzzles lying on the bench beside her. What with the natural tempers of these two agreeable animals, and what with Charlotte's frequent pastime of exasperating the one against the other, it had been found necessary to keep them muzzled to prevent fights: but Charlotte delighted in removing the muzzles, and setting them on,—as she had done now. Charlotte had these resources in addition to any possessed by Mrs. Verrall. Mrs. Verrall would not, of her own free-will, have touched a dog with her finger: if compelled to it, it would have been accomplished in the

most gingerly fashion with the extreme tip: and it was a positive source of annoyance to Mrs. Verrall, often of contention between them, Charlotte's admitting these dogs to familiar companionship. Charlotte, when weary from lack of pastime, could find it in the stables, or with her dogs. Many an hour did she thus pass: and, so far, she had the advantage of Mrs. Verrall. Mrs. Verrall often told Charlotte that she ought to have been born a man: it cannot be denied that some of her tastes were more appropriate to a man than to a gentlewoman.

Rodolf Pain reached the bench. It was a lovely place, secluded, and shaded by trees; with an opening in front to admit a panoramic view of the enchanting scenery. But, on the green mossy turf between that bench and the opening, snarled and fought those awful dogs,—neither the noise nor the pastime particularly in accordance with that pleasant spot, so suggestive of peace. Charlotte looked on approvingly, giving a helping word to either side which she might deem required it; while the King Charley barked and struggled in her arms because he was restrained from joining in the *mêlée*.

"I am going up at last, Charlotte."

"Up where?" asked Charlotte, without turning her eyes on Rodolf Pain.

"To town. Verrall's come back."

Surprise caused her to look at him now. "Verrall back!" she uttered. "He has come suddenly, then: he was not back five minutes ago. When are you going up?"

"I will tell you all about it, if you'll muzzle those brutes, and so stop their noise."

"Muzzle them yourself," said Charlotte, kicking the muzzles on to the grass with her foot.

Mr. Pain accomplished his task, though he did not particularly like it; neither was it over easy of accomplishment: the dogs were ferocious at the moment. He then drove them away, and Charlotte dropped her

King Charley that he might run after them,—which he did, barking his short, squeaking bark. Rodolf held out his hand to help Charlotte down from her standing on the bench: but Charlotte chose to remain where she was, and seated herself on one of its arms. Rodolf Pain took a seat on the bench, sideways, so as to face her, leaning his back against the other arm.

“When do you go?” repeated Charlotte.

“In an hour from this.”

“Quick work,” remarked Charlotte. “Verrall gives no time for the grass to grow, in any thing he has to do with.”

“The quick departure is mine,” said Mr. Pain. “So that I am in town for business to-morrow morning, it’s all that Verrall cares about. He suggested that I should go up by a night-train.”

“I should,” cried Charlotte, bluntly.

“No you would not,” answered Rodolf Pain, in a tone of bitterness. “Were you treated by any one as you treat me, you’d be glad enough to get away.”

“That’s good!” ejaculated Charlotte, with a ringing laugh. “I’m sure I treat you beautifully. Many a one would jump at getting the treatment from me that you get; I can tell you that, Mr. Dolf.”

Mr. Dolf smoked on in silence; rather savagely, for him.

“What have you to complain of?” pursued Charlotte.

“This,” said he, with sternness.

“That you promised to be my wife; that you have led me on, Heaven knows how long, causing me to believe you meant what you said, that you would keep your promise; and now you coolly turn round and jilt me! That bare fact is quite enough, Charlotte, without going into another mortifying fact,—your slighting behaviour to me lately.”

“Who says I have jilted you,—or that I mean to jilt you?” asked Charlotte.

“Who says it!” retorted Rodolf

Pain. “Why,—are you not doing so?”

“No. I dare say I shall have you some time.”

“I am getting tired of it, Charlotte,” said he, in a wearied tone of pain. “I have cared for nothing but you in the world—in the shape of woman—but I am getting tired; and I have had enough to make me. If you will fix our wedding now, before I go up, and keep to it, I’ll bless you for it, and make you a fonder husband than George Godolphin would have made you.”

“How dare you mention George Godolphin to me in that way?” cried Charlotte, with flashing eyes, for the sentence had roused all her ire. “You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Dolf Pain! Has not George Godolphin—as it turns out—been engaged to Maria Hastings longer than I have known him, and has now married her? Do you suppose I could have spent that time with them both in Scotland at Lady Godolphin’s, and not become acquainted with their secret? That must prove what your senseless jealousy was worth!”

“Charlotte,” said he, meekly, “as to George Godolphin, I readily confess I was mistaken, and I am sorry to have been so stupid. You might have set me right with a word, but I suppose you preferred to tease me. However, he is done with now. But, Charlotte, I tell you that altogether I am getting tired of it. Have me, or not, as you feel you can: but, played with any longer I will not be. If you dismiss me now, you dismiss me for good.”

“I have half a mind to say yes,” returned Charlotte, in the coolest tone, as if she were deciding upon a trifling matter; the choice of a bonnet, or the route to be pursued in a walk. “But there’s one thing holds me back, Dolf.”

“What’s that?” asked Dolf, whose cheek had lighted up with eager hope.

Charlotte leaped off the bench and sat down on it, nearer to Dolf, her accent and face as apparently honest

as if fibs were unknown to her. "And it is the only thing which has held me back all along," she went on, staring unflinchingly into Dolf's eyes.

"Well, what is it?" cried he.

"The hazard of the step."

"The hazard!" repeated Dolf. "What hazard?"

Charlotte glanced round, as if to convince herself that nothing with human ears was near, and her voice dropped to a whisper. "You and Verrall are not upon the safest course——"

"It's as safe as many others," interrupted Dolf Pain.

"Don't bother about others," testily rebuked Charlotte. "Look to itself. I say that it is hazardous: what little I know of it tells me that. I have heard a word dropped by you and a word dropped by Verrall, and I can put two and two together as well as most people. Is there no danger, no chance"—she spoke lower still, and with unmistakable gravity—"that a crisis might come, which—which would carry you to a place where nobody stands willingly—the Criminal Bar?"

"Good gracious, no!" cried Rodolf Pain, flinging his cigar away in his surprise and anger. "What could put that into your head, Charlotte? The—profession—may not be one of the strictest honor, and it has its dark sides as well as its light; but there's no danger of such a thing as you hint at. Where did you pick the idea up?"

"I don't know where. I have caught a word or two, not meant for me; and now and then I see things reported in the newspapers. You can't deny one thing, Dolf: that, if any unpleasantness should drop from the skies, it has been made a matter of arrangement that you should be the sufferer: not Verrall."

Rodolf's eyes expanded themselves beyond common. "How did you get to know that?" he asked.

"Never mind how I got to know it. Is it so?"

"Yes, it is," acknowledged Mr. Pain, who was by nature more truthful than

Charlotte. "But I give you my word of honor, Charlotte, that there's no danger of our falling into such a pit as you have hinted at. We should not be such fools. The worst that could happen to me would be a sojourn, short or long, in some snug place such as this, while Verrall puts things to rights. Like it has been now, for instance, through this business of Appleby's."

"You tell me this to satisfy me," said Charlotte.

"I tell it because it is truth—so far as my belief goes, or as I can foresee now."

"Very well. I accept it," returned Charlotte. "But now, Rodolf, mark what I say. If this worst state of things should come to pass——"

"It won't I tell you," he interrupted. "It can't."

"Will you listen? I choose to put the matter upon the supposition that it may. If this bad state of things should come to pass and you fall; I will never fall with you: and it is only upon that condition that I'll become your wife."

The words puzzled Mr. Pain not a little. "I don't understand you, Charlotte. As to 'conditions,' you may make any for yourself that you please—in reason."

"Very well. We will have an understanding with each other, drawn up as elaborately as if it were a marriage-settlement," she said, laughing. "Yes, Mr. Rodolf, while you have been ill-naturedly accusing me of designs upon the heart of George Godolphin, I was occupied with precautions touching my married life with you. You don't deserve me; and that's a fact. Let go my hand, will you. One of those dogs has got unmuzzled, I fancy, by the noise, and I must run, or there'll be dog-murder committed."

"Charlotte," he cried, feverishly and eagerly, *not* letting go her hand, "when shall it be?"

"As you like," she answered, indifferently. "This month, or next month, or the month after: I don't care."

The tone both mortified and pained him. His brow knit: and Charlotte saw the impression her words had left. She put on a pretty look of contrition.

"Mind, Rodolf, it shall be an understood thing, beforehand, that you don't attempt to control me in the smallest particular; that I have my own way in every thing."

"You will take care to have that, Charlotte, whether it be an understood thing beforehand, or not," replied he.

Charlotte laughed as she walked away,—a ringing laugh of power, which the air echoed: of power, at any rate, over the heart and will of Mr. Rodolf Pain.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DANGEROUS AMUSEMENT.

ON an April day, sunny and charming, a gentleman with a lady on his arm was strolling down one of the narrowest and dirtiest streets of Homburg. A tall man was he, young and handsome, with a fair Saxon face and fair Saxon curls. Could it be George Godolphin—who had gone away from Prior's Ash six months before, nothing but a shadowy wreck? It was George safe enough; restored to full strength, to perfect health. Maria, on the contrary, looked thin and delicate, and her face had lost a good deal of its color. They had wintered chiefly at Pau, but had left it a month past. Since then they had travelled about from place to place, by short stages, taking it easy, as George called it: staying a day or two in one town, a day or two in another, turning to the right or to the left, as inclination led them, going forwards, or going backwards: so that they were home the middle of April, it would be time enough. George had received *carte blanche* from Thomas Godolphin to remain out as long as he deemed it necessary; and George was not

one to decline the privilege. Play before work had always been George's motto.

On the previous evening they had arrived at Homburg from Wiesbaden, and were now taking their survey of the place. Neither liked its appearance so much as they had done many other places, and they were mutually agreeing to leave it again that evening, when a turning in the street brought them in view of another lady and gentleman, arm-in-arm like themselves.

"English, I am sure," remarked Maria, in a low tone.

"I should think so!" replied George, laughing. "Don't you recognize them?"

She had recognized them ere George finished speaking. Mr. and Mrs. Verrall! It took about ten minutes to ask and answer questions. "How strange that we should not have met before!" Mrs. Verrall cried. "We have been here this fortnight. But perhaps you have but just come?"

"Only last night," said George.

"My wife turned sick for a foreign tour, so I indulged her," explained Mr. Verrall. "We have been away a month now."

"And a fortnight of it at Homburg!" exclaimed George, in surprise. "What attraction can you find here? Maria and I were just saying that we would leave it to-night."

"It's as good as any other of these German places, for all I see," carelessly remarked Mr. Verrall. "How well you are looking!" he added to George.

"I cannot pay you the same compliment," Mrs. Verrall said to Maria. "What have you done with your roses?"

Maria's "roses" came vividly into her cheeks at the question. "I am not in strong health just now," was all she answered.

George smiled. "There's nothing serious the matter, Mrs. Verrall," said he. "Maria will find her roses again after a while. Charlotte has—I was going to say changed her name,"

broke off George: "but in her case that would be a wrong figure of speech. She is married, we hear."

"Long ago," said Mrs. Verrall. "Charlotte's quite an old married woman by this time. It took place—let me see?—last November. They live in London."

"Mr. Pain is her cousin, is he not?"

"Yes. It was an old engagement," continued Mrs. Verrall, looking at George. "Many a time, when she and you were flirting together, I had to call her to account, and remind her of Mr. Pain."

George could not remember that Mrs. Verrall had ever done such a thing in his presence: she had been rather remarkable for non-interference,—for leaving him and Charlotte to go their own way. But he did not say so.

They turned and continued their walk together. George—he had lost none of his gallantry—taking his place by the side of Mrs. Verrall.

In passing a spot where there was partial obstruction, some confusion occurred. A house was under repair, and earth and stones lay half-way across the street, giving barely room for any vehicle to pass. Just as they were opposite this, a lumbering coach, containing a gay party inside, with white bows in their caps—probably a christening—came rattling up at a sharp pace. George Godolphin, taking Mrs. Verrall's hand, piloted her to safety. Maria was not so fortunate. Mr. Verrall was a little behind her or before her: at any rate, he was not adroit enough to assist her at the right moment; and Maria, seeing no escape between the coach and the debris, jumped upon the latter, a great mound of it. The awkward stones moved under her feet, and she slipped off again with a jerk on the other side. It did not hurt her much, but it shook her greatly. George, who was looking back at the time, had sprung back and caught her, before Mr. Verrall well saw what had occurred.

"My darling, how did it happen?"

"Are you hurt? Verrall, could you not have taken better care?" reiterated George, his face flushed with emotion and alarm.

Maria leaned heavily upon him, and drew a long breath before she could speak. "I am not hurt, George."

"Are you sure?" he anxiously cried.

Maria smiled reassuringly. "It is nothing, indeed. It has only shaken me. See! I came right off that heap. I must have been careless, I think."

George turned to look at the "heap." A good heap it was, about three feet from the ground. She had alighted on her feet; not quite falling; but staggering with the lower part of her back against the stones. Mrs. Verrall shook the dust off her dress behind, and Mr. Verrall apologized for his inattention.

George took her upon his arm, with an air that seemed to intimate he should not trust her to anybody again, and they went back to their hotel, Mrs. Verrall saying she should call in upon them in half an hour's time.

Maria was looking pale; quite white. George, in much concern, untied her bonnet-strings. "Maria, I fear you *are* hurt!"

"Indeed I am not—as I believe," she answered. "Why do you think so?"

"Because you are not looking well."

"I was startled at the time; frightened. I shall overget it directly, George."

"I think you had better see a doctor. I suppose there's a decent one to be found in the town."

"Oh no!" returned Maria, with much emphasis, in her surprise. "See a doctor because I slipped down a little way! Why, George, that would be foolish! I have often jumped from a higher height than that. Do you remember the old wall at the rectory? We children were forever jumping from it."

"That was one time and this is another, Mrs. George Godolphin," said he, significantly.

Maria laughed. "Only fancy the absurdity, George! Were a doctor

called in, his first question would be, 'Where are you hurt, madame?' 'Not anywhere, monsieur,' would be my reply. 'Then what do you want with me?' he'd say; and how foolish I should look!"

George laughed too, and resigned the point. "You are the best judge, of course, Maria. Margery," he continued,—for Margery at that moment entered the room,—“your mistress has had a fall.”

"Had a fall!" uttered Margery, in her abrupt manner, as she turned round to regard Maria.

"It could not be called a fall, Margery," said Maria, slightly. "I slipped off some earth and stuff. I did not quite fall."

"Be you hurt, ma'am?"

"It did not hurt me at all. It only shook me."

"Nasty things, them slips be sometimes!" resumed Margery. "I have known pretty good bouts of illness grow out of 'em."

George did not relish the remark. He made it in the presence of Margery to make it in the presence of his wife, under the circumstances. "You must croak, or it would not be you, Margery," said he, in a cross tone.

It a little put up Margery. "I can tell you what, Master George," cried she; "that your own mother was in her bed for eight weeks, through nothing on earth but slipping down two stairs. I say them shakes are ticklish things,—when the body's not in a condition to bear 'em. Ma'am, you must just take my advice, and lie yourself down on that sofa, and not get off it for the day. There ain't a doctor in the land as knows any thing, but 'ud say the same."

Margery was peremptory; George joined her in being peremptory also; and Maria, with much laughter and protestation, was fain to let them put her on the sofa. "Just as if I were ill, or delicate!" she grumbled.

"And pray, ma'am, what do you call yourself but delicate? You are not one of the strong ones," cried Margery, as she left the room for a shawl.

George drew his wife's face to his in an impulse of affection, and began kissing it. "Don't pay attention to Margery's croaking, my dearest," he fondly said. "But she is quite right in recommending you to lie still. It will rest you."

"I am afraid I shall go to sleep,—condemned to lie here," said Maria, smiling.

"The best thing you can do," said George. "Catch me trusting you to anybody's care again!"

In a short while Mrs. Verrall came in, and told George that her husband was waiting for him outside. George went out, and Mrs. Verrall sat down by Maria.

"It is Margery's doings, Margery's and George's," cried Maria, as if she would apologize for being found on the sofa, covered up like an invalid. "They made me lie down."

"Are you happy?" Mrs. Verrall somewhat abruptly asked.

"Happy?" repeated Maria, at a loss to understand the exact meaning.

"Happy with George Godolphin. Are you and he happy with each other?"

A soft blush overspread Maria's face; a light of love shone in her eyes. "Oh, so happy!" she murmured. "Mrs. Verrall, I wonder sometimes whether any one in all the world is as happy as I am!"

"Because it struck me that you are changed,—that you look ill."

"Oh, that," returned Maria, with a rosier blush still. "Can't you guess the cause of that, Mrs. Verrall? As George told you, I shall, I hope, look well again after a while."

Mrs. Verrall shrugged her shoulders with indifference. She had never lost her bloom from any such cause.

Maria found—or Margery did for her—that the fall had shaken her more than was expedient. After all, a medical man had to be called in. Illness supervened. It was not a very serious illness, and not at all dangerous; but it had the effect of detaining them at Homburg. Maria lay in bed, and George spent most of his time with the Verralls.

With Mr. Verrall chiefly. Especially in an evening. George would go out, sometimes before dinner, sometimes after it, and come home so late that he did not venture into Maria's room to say good-night to her. Since her illness he had occupied an adjoining chamber. It did Maria no good: she would get flushed, excited, heated: and when George did come in, he would look flushed and excited also.

"But, George, where do you stay so late?"

"Only with Verrall."

"You look so hot. I am sure you are feverish."

"The rooms were very hot. We have been watching them play. Good-night, darling. I wish you were well!"

Watching them play! It is your first deceit to your wife, George Godolphin; and, rely upon it, no good will come of it. Mr. Verrall had introduced George to the dangerous gaming salles; had contrived to imbue him with a liking for the insidious vice. Did he do so with—as our terms of law express it—malice aforethought? Let the response lie with Mr. Verrall.

On the very first evening that they were together, the day of the slight accident to Maria, Mr. Verrall asked George to dine with him; and he afterwards took him to the tables. George did not play that evening; but George grew excited, watching others play. Heavy stakes were lost and won; evil passions were called forth; avarice, hatred, despair. Mr. Verrall played for a small sum; and won. "It whiles away an hour or two," he carelessly remarked to George as they were leaving. "And one can take care of oneself."

"All can't take care of themselves, apparently," answered George Godolphin. "Did you observe that haggard-looking Englishman, leaning against the wall and biting his nails when his money had gone? The expression of that man's face will haunt me for a week to come. Those are the men that commit suicide."

Mr. Verrall smiled, half mockingly.

"Suicide! Not they," he answered. "The man will be there to-morrow evening refeathered."

"I never felt more pity for any one in my life," continued George. "There was despair in his face, if I ever saw despair. I could have found in my heart to go up and offer him my purse; only I knew it would be staked the next moment at the green table."

"You did not know him, then?"

"No."

Mr. Verrall mentioned the man's name, and George felt momentarily surprised. He was a baronet's eldest son.

The next evening came round. Maria was confined to her bed then, and George a gentleman at large,—a gentleman at large to be pounced upon by Mr. Verrall. He came—Verrall—and carried George off again to dinner.

"Let us take a stroll," said he, later in the evening.

Their stroll took them towards the scene of the night before, Mr. Verrall's being the moving *will*. "Shall we see who's there?" he said, with great apparent indifference.

George answered as indifferently: but there was an under-current of meaning in his tone, wonderful for careless George Godolphin. "Better keep out of temptation."

Mr. Verrall laughed till the tears came into his eyes: he said George made him laugh. "Come along," cried he, in a mocking tone. "I'll take care of you."

That night George played,—a little. "As well put a gold piece down," Mr. Verrall whispered to him. "I shall." George staked more than one gold piece,—and won. A fortnight had gone over since, and George Godolphin had become imbued with the fearful passion of gambling,—at any rate, imbued with it temporarily: it is to be hoped that he will leave it behind him when he leaves Homburg.

Just look at him, as he stands over that green cloth, with a flushed face and eager eyes! He is of finer form, of loftier stature than most of those

who are crowding round the tables; his features betray higher intellect, greater refinement; but the same passions are just now distorting them. Mr. Verrall is by his side, cool, calm, impassive: somehow that man, Verrall, always wins. If he did not, he'd not lose his coolness: he would only leave the tables.

"Rouge!" called George.

It was noir. George flung his last money on the board, and moved away.

Mr. Verrall followed him. "Tired already?"

Mr. George let slip a furious word. "The luck has been against me all along,—nearly from the first night I played here. I am cleaned out again."

"I can let you have——"

"Thank you!" hastily interrupted George. "You are very accommodating, Verrall, but it seems we may go on at the same thing forever,—I losing, and you finding me money. How much is it that I owe you altogether?"

"A bagatelle. Never mind that."

"A *bagatelle!*" repeated George.

"It's well money is so valueless to you: I don't call it one. And I have never been a man given to look at money before spending it."

"You can pay me when and how you like,—this year, next year, the year after,—I shan't sue you for it," laughed Mr. Verrall. "There, go along and redeem your luck."

He held out a heavy roll of notes to George. The latter's eager fingers clutched hold of them; but, even as they were within his grasp, better thoughts came over him. He pushed them back again.

"I am too deep in your debt already, Verrall."

"As you please," returned Mr. Verrall, with indifference. "There the notes are, lying idle. As to what you have had, if it's such a dreadful burden on your conscience, you can give me interest for it. You can let the principal lie, I say, if it is for ten years to come. One half hour's play with these notes may redeem all you have lost."

He left the notes lying by George Godolphin,—by hesitating George,—with the fierce passion to use them that was burning within him. Mr. Verrall could not have taken a more efficient way of inducing him to play again than to affect this easy indifference of manner, and to leave the money under his eyes, touching his fingers, fevering his brain. George took up the notes.

"You are sure you will let me pay you interest, Verrall?"

"Of course I will."

And George walked off to the gaming-table.

He went home later that night than he had gone at all, wiping the perspiration from his brow, lifting his face to the quiet stars, and gasping to catch a breath of air. Mr. Verrall found it rather cool than not; shrugged his shoulders, and said he could do with an overcoat; but George felt stifled. The roll had gone, and some more to it,—had gone, and George Godolphin was Mr. Verrall's debtor to a heavy amount.

"Thank goodness the day has already dawned!" involuntarily broke forth George.

Mr. Verrall looked at him for an explanation. He did not understand what particular cause for thankfulness there should be in that.

"We shall get away from the place to-day," said George. "If I stopped in it I should come to the dogs."

"Nothing of the sort," cried Mr. Verrall. "Luck is safe to turn some time. It's like the tide: it has its time for flowing in, and its time for flowing out: once let it turn, and it comes rushing in all one way. But, what do you mean about going? Your wife is not well enough to travel yet."

"Yes she is," was George's answer. "Quite well enough."

"Of course you know best. I think you should consider——"

"Verrall, I should consider my wife's health and safety before any earthly thing," interrupted George. "We might have started to-day, had we liked,—I speak of the day that has

gone. The doctor said yesterday that she was well enough to travel."

"I was not aware of that. I shall stay here a week longer."

"And I shall be away before to-morrow night."

"Not you," cried Mr. Verrall.

"I shall: if I keep in the mind I am in now."

Mr. Verrall smiled. He knew George was not over-famous for keeping his resolutions. In the morning, when his smarting should be over, he would stay on, fast enough. They wished each other good night, and George turned into his hotel.

To his great surprise, Margery met him on the stairs. "Are you walking the house like the ghosts?" cried he, with a renewal of his good humor. Nothing pleased George better than to give old Margery a joking or a teasing word. "Why are you not in bed?"

"There's enough real ghosts in the world, as is my belief, without my personating 'em, sir," was Margery's answer. "I'm not in bed yet, because my mistress is not in bed."

"Your mistress not in bed!" repeated George. "But that is very wrong."

"So it is," said Margery. "But it has been of no use my telling her so. She took it into her head to sit up for you; and sit up she has. Not there, sir,—for he was turning to their sitting-room—"she is a lying back in the big chair in her bed-chamber."

George entered. Maria, white and wan and tired, was lying back, as Margery expressed it, in the large easy-chair. She was too fatigued, too exhausted to get up: she only held out her hand to her husband.

"My darling, you know this is wrong," he gently said, bending over her. "Good heavens, Maria! how ill and tired you look."

"I should not have slept had I gone to-bed," she said. "George, tell me where you have been: where it is that you go in an evening."

A misgiving crossed George Godol-

phin's mind—that she already knew. She looked painfully distressed, and there was a peculiar significance in her tone, but she spoke with timid deprecation. His conscience told him that the amusement he had been recently pursuing would not shine well in the broad light of day. An unmarried man may send himself to ruin if it pleases himself to do it; but not one who has assumed the responsibilities that George Godolphin had. Ruin, however, had not yet come to George Godolphin, or fear of ruin. The worst that had happened was, that he had contracted a debt to Mr. Verrall, which he did not at present see his way clear to pay. He could not pay so large a sum out of the bank without the question being put by his partners, Where does it go to? Mr. Verrall had, however, relieved him of the embarrassment by suggesting interest. A very easy settling of the question it appeared to the careless mind of George Godolphin: and he felt obliged to Mr. Verrall.

"Maria!" he exclaimed, "what are you thinking of? What is the matter?"

Maria changed her position. She let her head slip from the easy-chair on to his sheltering arm. "Mrs. Verrall frightened me, George. Will you be angry with me if I tell you? She came in this evening, and she said you and Mr. Verrall were losing all your money at the gaming-table."

George Godolphin's face grew hot and angry, worse than it had been in the gambling-room, and he gave Mrs. Verrall an exceedingly complimentary mental word. "What possessed her to say that?" he exclaimed. And in truth he wondered what could have possessed her. Verrall, at any rate was not losing his money. "Were you so foolish as to believe it, Maria?"

"Only a little of it, George. Pray forgive me! I am weak just now, you know, and things startle me. I have heard dreadful tales of these foreign gaming-places: and I knew how much you had been out at night since we came here. "It is not so, is it, George?"

George made a show of laughing at her anxiety. "I and Verrall have strolled into the places and watched the play," said he. "We have staked a few coins ourselves,—not to be looked upon as two churls who put their British noses into every thing and then won't pay for the sight. I lost what I staked, with a good grace; but, as to Verrall, I don't believe he is a half-penny out of pocket. Mrs. Verrall must have been quarrelling with her husband, and so thought she'd say something to spite him. And my wife must take it for gospel, and begin to fret herself into a fever!"

Maria drew a long, relieved breath. The address was candid, the manner was playful and tender: and she possessed the most implicit faith in her husband. Maria had doubted almost the whole world, before she could have doubted George Godolphin. She drew his face down upon hers, once more whispering that he was to forgive her for being so silly.

"My dearest, I have been thinking that we may as well go on to-morrow. To-day, that is: I won't tell you the time, if you don't know it; but it's morning."

She knew the time quite well. No anxious wife ever sat up for a husband yet, but knew it. In her impatience to be away—for she was most desirous of being at home again—she could take note of the one sentence only. "Oh, George, yes! Let us go!"

"Will you promise to get a good night's rest first, and not attempt to be out of bed before eleven o'clock to-morrow morning, then?"

"George, I will promise you any thing," she cried, with a radiant face. "Only say we shall start for home to-morrow!"

"Yes, we will."

And, somewhat to Mr. Verrall's surprise, they did start. That gentleman made no attempt to detain them. "But it is shabby of you both to go off like this, and leave us amid these foreigners, like babes in the wood," said he, when Maria was already in

the carriage, and George was about to step into it.

"There is nothing to prevent your leaving too, is there, Mr. Verrall?" asked Maria, leaning forward. "And what did you and Mrs. Verrall do before we came? You had been babes in the wood a fortnight then."

"Fairly put, young lady," returned Mr. Verrall. "I must congratulate you on one thing, Mrs. George Godolphin: that, in spite of your recent indisposition, you are looking more like yourself to-day than I have seen you yet."

"That is because I am going home," said Maria.

And home they reached in safety. The continental land-journey, the pleasant sea-trip,—for the day and the waters were alike calm,—and then the land again, all grew into things of the past, and they were once more back at Prior's Ash. As they drove to the bank from the railway-station, Maria looked up at the house when it came in sight, a thrill of joy running through her heart. What a happy home it will be for me! was her glad thought.

"What would Thomas and old Crosse say, if they knew I had dipped into it so deep at Homburg!" was the involuntary thought which flashed across George Godolphin.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HOME.

GEORGE GODOLPHIN and Maria were holding a levee. It could be called nothing else. Not very strong yet, George would only allow Maria to travel by easy journeys, and they had arrived at home early in the afternoon. Mrs. Hastings and Grace, Bessy and Cecil Godolphin, Thomas Godolphin and Mr. Crosse, all were crowding into the back-parlor to welcome them. Not the business-parlor; but the large and pleasant dining-room, used also

as a sitting-room, on the right of the private entrance; the room that used to be the chief sitting-room of the Miss Godolphins.

Maria had thrown off her bonnet and shawl, and stood amidst them all, in her dark-silk traveling-dress, somewhat creased. There was no mistaking that she was intensely happy: her eye was radiant, her color softly bright, her fair young face without a cloud. And now walked in the rector of All Souls', having escaped (nothing loth) from a stormy vestry-meeting to see Maria. Miss Godolphin was not there: temporary indisposition kept her at Ashlydyat. In the spring and autumn of the year she would be occasionally troubled with a heating humor in the legs, a species of erysipelas, and it confined her within doors.

"I have brought her home safe, you see, sir," George said to Mr. Hastings, leading Maria up to him.

"And yourself also," was the rector's reply. "You are worth two of the shaky man that went away."

"I told you I should be, sir, if you allowed Maria to go with me," cried ready, gallant George. "I do not fancy we are either of us the worse for our sojourn abroad."

"I don't think either of you look as though you were," said the rector. "Maria is thin. I suppose you are not sorry to come home, Miss Maria?"

"So glad!" she said. "I began to think it very, very long, not to see you all. But, papa, I am not Miss Maria now."

"You saucy child!" exclaimed Mr. Hastings. But the rector had the laugh against him. Mrs. Hastings drew Maria aside.

"My dear, you have been ill, George wrote me word. How did it happen? We were so sorry to hear it."

"Yes, we were sorry too," replied Maria, her eyelashes resting on her hot cheek. "It could not be helped."

"But how did it happen?"

"It was my own fault: not my intentional fault, you know, mamma. It occurred the day after we reached

Homburg. I and George were out walking and we met the Verralls. We turned with them, and then I had not hold of George's arm. Something was amiss in the street, a great mess of stones and earth and rubbish; and, to avoid a carriage that came by, I stepped upon it. And somehow I slipped off. I did not appear to have hurt myself: but I suppose it shook me."

"You met the Verralls at Homburg?" cried Mrs. Hastings, in surprise.

"Yes. Did George not mention it when he wrote? They are at Homburg still. Unless they have now left it."

"George never puts a superfluous word in his letters," said Mrs. Hastings, with a smile. "He says just what he has to say, and no more. He mentioned that you were not well, and therefore some little delay might take place in the return home: but he said nothing of the Verralls."

Maria laughed. "George never writes a long letter——"

"Who's that, taking George's name in vain?" cried George, looking round.

"It is I, George. You never told mamma, when you wrote, that the Verralls were with us at Homburg."

"I'm sure I don't remember whether I did or not," said George.

"The Verralls are in Wales," observed Mr. Hastings.

"Then they have traveled to it pretty quickly," observed George. "When I and Maria left Homburg we left them in it. They had been there a month then."

Not one present but looked up with surprise. "The impression in Prior's Ash is, that they are in Wales," observed Thomas Godolphin. "It is the answer given by the servants to all callers at Lady Godolphin's Folly."

"They are certainly at Homburg, whatever the servants may say," persisted George. "The servants are laboring under a mistake."

"It is a curious mistake for the servants to make, though," observed the rector, in a dry, caustic tone.

"I think the Verralls are curious

people altogether," said Bessy Godolphin.

"I don't know but they are," assented George. "But Verrall is a thoroughly good-hearted man, and I shall always speak up for him."

Meanwhile Margery had asked leave of Maria, and gone up to Ashlydyat. Indeed, it was not much "asking leave," for that was not greatly Margery's fashion. "I must go up and see Miss Godolphin, ma'am," had been what she said to Maria. And Maria good-naturedly bade her not hurry back.

"And what is to be my service, Miss Janet?" was nearly the first question asked by Margery of Miss Godolphin. Nothing had been said before Margery went abroad, whether she was to return to Ashlydyat, or to continue with Maria: her ostensible business with Mr. and Mrs. George had been to—as everybody had phrased it—look after him.

"You know I should like you back here, Margery," Janet replied. "But it shall be as you please."

"If it is as I please, I shall come back for certain," was Margery's answer. "Not that I have any fault to find with Master George's wife. I like her better, Miss Janet, than I had thought it possible to like anybody but a Godolphin."

"She is a Godolphin now, Margery."

"Ah," said Margery. "But she's not a Godolphin born, Miss Janet."

That evening, George and his wife dined alone. George was standing over the fire after dinner, when Maria came and stood near him. He put out his arm and drew her to his side.

"It seems so strange, George—the being in this house with you all alone," she whispered.

"Stranger than being my wife, Maria?"

"Oh, but I have got used to that." George laughed: she spoke so simply and naturally. "You will get used in time to this being your home, my darling."

"I shall like the home so much! I

hope it will be our home always, George."

"It will be so. Unless——"

"Unless what? Why do you stop?"

"I stopped, Maria, because I felt ashamed of the thought that had come over me. Unless Ashlydyat should fall in, I was about to say."

"Ashlydyat! But, George, that only comes to us through Thomas's death!" she gravely said.

"True. I say I was ashamed of the thought: it came to me without my will. I sincerely hope that Thomas may enjoy it to his old age. Suppose we go up and see Janet!" he continued. "She cannot come out, and I know it would please her. But perhaps you are tired to-night, Maria?"

"Indeed I am not. I should like the walk. And I should like to see Janet."

They started. It was about eight o'clock. A fine moonlight evening, and they took the way down Crosse Street. The same way that Thomas Godolphin (if you remember it) had once gone; up the lonely walk and round the trees to the Dark Plain.

Nothing had been farther from the thoughts both of George Godolphin and his wife, than that Dark Plain's ominous shadow, the reputed foreteller of ill to the Godolphins. But the Shadow was there. Never clearer, never darker, never more palpably distinct, had it been, than it appeared now.

Maria had never seen it, and the fact of what it was did not at once strike her. "What's that?" she asked of George. "What a strange-looking——Oh, George is it the *Shadow*?"

Her voice had dropped to an awe-struck tone. George's courage appeared to have dropped with it. He stood, startled: gazing at it with wondering eyes.

"George, is it the Shadow?"

"It is what *they call* the Shadow, Maria," he presently said, assuming a careless air.

"Something *must* cast it!" she exclaimed.

"It must," replied George; "it must, and it does. It is my firm conviction that we shall sometime discover what it is that does cast it," he continued, too earnestly to give suspicion of an evasive meaning.

Maria was gazing at the Shadow, her heart beating as she traced, bit by bit, its superstitious form.

"I am sure that it arises from natural causes," George continued, speaking to himself more than to Maria. "If I could only find out whence they come! I wonder if the archway throws out——"

A shriek at Maria's elbow. It proved to be from Margery. She had come quickly up on her way from Ashlydyat, and had caught sight of the Shadow.

"What brings *you* here to-night?" she uttered in a sharp tone, quite as if she were their equal and had power to order them about. But never was Margery more faithful, more affectionate at heart, than when her manner subsided into abruptness. "And this is the first time you have been on the Dark Plain since your marriage!" she went rapidly on, in very great agitation. "Oh, sir, you know what they say! That if that Shadow appears——"

George turned round with an imperative gesture; his face white, partly with emotion, partly with anger. What nonsense was she about to give utterance to, in the hearing of his young wife? "You forget yourself strangely, Margery," was his sharp rebuke.

Margery's eyes were fixed upon the Shadow, and her hands were lifted as if in dread; in pain. "I could be upon my Bible oath, if necessary, that it was not there a few minutes back," she uttered. "I came past here, and then I remembered something I had forgotten at Ashlydyat, and went back for it. It was not there then."

CHAPTER XXV.

SIXTY POUNDS TO OLD JEKYL.

STANDING on the covered terrace outside the dining-room at the bank, in all the warm beauty of the late and lovely spring morning, surrounded by luxuriant shrubs, by the perfume of flowers, the green lawn stretching out before her, the pleasant sitting-room behind her, its large window open and its paintings on the walls conspicuous, was Maria Godolphin. She wore a morning-dress, simple and pretty as of yore, and her fair face had lost none of its beauty, scarcely any of its youth. To look at her, you would not think that a month had elapsed since she came there, to her home, after her marriage: and yet the time, since then, would not be counted by months, but by years. Six years and a half, turned, it is, since her marriage took place, and the little girl, whom Maria is holding by the hand, is five years old. Just now Maria's face is all animation. She is talking to the child, and talking also to Jonathan and David Jekyl: but if you saw her at an unoccupied moment, her face in repose, you might detect an expression of settled sadness in it. It arose from the loss of her children. Three had died in succession, one after the other; and this one, the eldest, was the only child remaining to her,—a wondrously pretty little girl, her naked legs peeping between her frilled drawers and her white socks; with the soft brown eyes of her mother, and the Saxon curls of her father. With the mother's eyes the child had inherited her mother's gentle temperament: and Margery—who had found in her heart to leave Ashlydyat and become the nurse of George's children—was wont to say that she never had to do with so sweet-tempered a child. She had been named Maria: but the name, for familiar use, was corrupted into Meta: not to clash with Maria's. She held her mother's hand, and, by dint of stretching up on her toes,

could just bring her eyes above the marble-top of the terrace balustrade.

"Donatan, why don't you use that bing ting, to-day?"

Jonathan looked up, a broad grin on his face. He delighted in little children. He liked to hear them call him "Donatan:" and the little lady before him was as backward in the sound of the "th," as if she had been French. "She means the scythe, ma'am," said Jonathan.

"I know she does," said Maria. "The grass does not want mowing to-day, Meta. David, do you not think those rose-trees are backward?"

David gave a grunt. "I should wonder if they was for'ard. There ain't no rose-trees for miles round but what is back'ard, except them as have been nursed. With the cutting spring we've had, how be the rose-trees to get on, I'd like to know?"

Jonathan looked round, his face quite a sunshine compared to David's: his words also. "They'll come on famous now, ma'am, with this lovely weather. Ten days of it, and we shall have 'em all out in bloom. Little miss shall have a rare posy then, and I'll cut off the thorns first."

"A big one, mind, Donatan," responded the young lady, beginning to dance her feet about in anticipation. The child had a particular liking for roses, which Jonathan remembered. She had inherited her mother's great love for flowers.

"David, how is your wife?" asked Maria.

"I've not heard as there's any thing the matter with her," was David's phlegmatic answer, without lifting his face from the bed. He and Jonathan were both engaged nearly at one spot,—David, it must be confessed, getting through more work than Jonathan.

They had kept that garden in order for Mr. Crosse, when the bank was his residence. Also for Thomas Godolphin and his sisters, the short time they had lived there; and afterwards for George. George had now a full complement of servants,—rather

more than a complement, indeed,—and one of them might well have attended that small garden. Janet had suggested as much: but easy George continued to employ the Jekyls. It was not often that the two attended together; as they were doing on this day.

"David," returned Maria, in answer to his remark, "I am sure you must know that your wife is often ailing. She is any thing but strong. Only, she is always merry and in good spirits, and so people take her to be better than she is. She is quite a contrast to you, David," Maria added, with a smile. "You don't talk and laugh much."

"Talking and laughing don't get on a man's work, as ever I heered on," returned David.

"Is it true that your father slipped yesterday and sprained his ankle?" continued Maria. "I heard that he did."

"True enough," grunted David.

"'Twas all along of his good fortin, ma'am," cried good-tempered Jonathan. "He was so elated with it that he slipped down Gaffer Thorpe's steps, where he was going to tell the news, and fell upon his ancle. The damage ain't of much account. But that's old father all over! Prime him up with a bit of good fortin, and he's all cock-a-hoop."

"What is the good fortune?" asked Maria.

"It's that money come to him at last, ma'am, what he had waited for so long. I'm sure we had all give it up for lost: and father he stewed and he fretted over it, a wondering always what was a going to become of him in his old age. 'Taint so very much, neither."

"Sixty pound is sixty pound," grunted David.

"Well, so it is," acquiesced Jonathan. "And father he looks to it to make him more comfortable than he could be from his profits; his honey, and his garden, and that. He was like a child last night, ma'am, a planning what he'd do with it. I telled him he had

better put it into the bank here: it 'ud be safe then."

"So it would," replied Maria. "Tell him I say so, Jonathan. It will be safe here. He might be paid interest for it."

"I will, ma'am."

Maria spoke the words in hearty good faith. Her mind had conjured up a vision of old Jekyl keeping his sixty pounds in his house, in the foot of some old stocking: and she thought how easily he might be robbed of it. "Yes, Jonathan, tell him to bring it here: don't let him keep it by him, to lose it."

Maria had another auditor, of whose proximity she was unconscious. It was her mother. Mrs. Hastings had been admitted by a servant, and came through the room on to the terrace, unheard by Maria. The little girl's ears—like all children's—were sharp, and she turned her head, and broke into a joyous cry of "Grandma!" Maria looked round.

"Oh, mamma! I did not know you were here. Are you quite well? I was busy talking to Jonathan and David, and did not hear you. Old Jekyl has come into a little money. I tell them not to let him keep it by him to be lost, but to bring it to the bank."

Mrs. Hastings withdrew within the room, and sat down. Maria followed. She fancied her mother was looking dispirited.

"Yes, child," was Mrs. Hastings's reply to the question. "We have had news from Reginald this morning, and the news is not good. He has been getting into some disagreeable scrape, over there, and it has taken a hundred pounds or two to get him clear,—which, of course, they come upon us for."

Maria's countenance fell. "Reginald is very unlucky. He seems always to be getting into scrapes."

"He always is," said Mrs. Hastings. "We thought he could not get into mischief at sea: but it appears that he does. The ship was at Calcutta still, but they were expecting daily to sail for home."

"What is it that he has been doing?" asked Maria.

"I do not quite understand what," replied Mrs. Hastings. "I saw his letter, but that was not very explanatory. What it chiefly contained were expressions of contrition, and promises of amendment. The captain wrote to your papa: and that letter he would not give me to read. Your papa's motive was a good one, no doubt,—to save me vexation. But, my dear, he forgets that uncertainty causes the imagination to run loose, and to conjure up fears, worse, probably, than the reality."

"As Reginald gets older, he will get steadier," remarked Maria. "And mamma, whatever it may be, your grieving over it will not mend it."

"True," replied Mrs. Hastings. "But," she added, with a sad smile, "when your children shall be as old as mine, Maria, you will have learnt how impossible it is to a mother not to grieve. Have you forgotten the old saying? 'When our children are young, they tread upon our toes; but when they get older they tread upon our hearts.'"

Little Miss Meta was treading upon her toes then. The child's tiny shoes were dancing upon grandmamma's in her eagerness to get close to her, to tell her that Donatan was going to give her a great big handful of roses, as soon as they were blown, with the thorns cut off.

"Come to me, Meta," said Maria. She saw that her mamma was not in a mood to be troubled with children, and she drew the child on to her own knee. "Mamma, I am going for a drive presently," she continued. "Would it not do you good to go with me?"

"I don't know that I could spare the time this morning," said Mrs. Hastings. "Are you going far?"

"I can go far or near, as you please," replied Maria. "We have a new carriage, and George told me at breakfast that I had better try it, and see how I liked it."

"A new carriage!" replied Mrs.

Hastings, her accent betraying some surprise. "Had you not enough carriages, Maria?"

"In truth I think we had, mamma. This new one is one that George took a fancy to, when he was in London last week; and he bought it."

"Child,—though of course it is no business of mine,—you surely did not want it. What sort of a carriage is it?"

"It is a large one,—a kind of barchouche. It will do you good to go out with me. I will order it at once if you will go, mamma."

Mrs. Hastings did not immediately reply. She appeared to have fallen into thought. Presently she raised her head and looked at Maria.

"My dear, I have long thought of mentioning to you a certain subject; and I think I will do it now. Strictly speaking, it is, as I say, no business of mine, but I cannot help being anxious for your interests."

Maria felt somewhat alarmed. It appeared a formidable preamble.

"I and your papa sometimes talk it over, one with another. And we say"—Mrs. Hastings smiled, as if to disarm her words of their serious import—"that we wish we could put old heads upon young shoulders,—upon yours and your husband's."

"But why?—in what way?" cried Maria.

"My dear, if you and he had old heads, you would, I think, see how very wrong—I speak the word only in your interests, Maria—it is, to maintain so great and expensive an establishment. It must cost you and George, here, far more than it costs them at Ashlydyat."

"Yes, I suppose it does," said Maria.

"We do not know what your husband's income is——"

"I do not know it either," spoke Maria, for Mrs. Hastings had made a pause and looked at her, almost as though she would give opportunity for the information to be supplied. "George never speaks to me upon money matters or business affairs."

"Well, whatever it is," resumed Mrs. Hastings, "we should judge that

he must be living up to every farthing of it. How much better it would be if you were to live more moderately, and put something by!"

"I dare say it would," acquiesced Maria. "To tell you the truth, mamma, there are times when I get into a thoughtful mood, and feel half frightened at our expenditure. But then again I reflect that George knows his own affairs and his own resources far better than I do. The expense is of his instituting, not of mine."

"George is proverbially careless," significantly spoke Mrs. Hastings.

"But, mamma, if, at the end of one year, he found his expenses heavier than they ought to be, he would naturally retrench them for the next. His not doing it proves that he can afford it."

"I am not saying or thinking that he cannot afford it, Maria, in one sense: I do not suppose he outruns his income. But you might live at half the expense, and be quite as comfortable, perhaps more so. Servants, carriages, horses, dress, dinner-parties!—I know you must spend enormously."

"Well, so we do," replied Maria.

"But, mamma, you are perhaps unaware that George has an equal share with Thomas. He has indeed. When Mr. Crosse retired, Thomas, in his generosity, told George it should be so for the future."

"Did he! There are not many like Thomas Godolphin. Still, Maria, whatever may be the income, I maintain my argument, that you keep up unnecessary style and extravagance. Remember, my dear, that you had no marriage-settlement,—and the more you save the better for your children. You may have many yet."

"I think I will talk to George about it," mused Maria.

Of course, the past seven years had not been without their changes. Mr. Crosse had retired from the bank, and Thomas Godolphin, in his generosity, immediately constituted his brother an equal partner. He had not been so previously. Neither had it been contemplated by Sir George in his

lifetime that it was so to be, yet a while: the state maintained at Ashlydyat took more to keep it up than the quiet way in which it was supposed George would live at the bank, and Thomas was the representative Godolphin. But Thomas Godolphin was incapable of any conduct bordering in the remotest degree upon covetousness or meanness. They were the sons of one father; and though there was the difference in their ages, and he was the chief of the Godolphins, he made George's share equal to his own.

It was well perhaps that he did so. Otherwise George might have got into shoals and quicksands. He appeared to have no notion of living quietly: had he possessed the great purse of Fortunatus, which had no bottom, we are told, and was always full of gold, he could not have been much more careless of money. Rumor went, too, that all Mr. George's wild oats—bushels of which, you may remember to have heard, Prior's Ash gave him credit for—were not yet sown; and wild oats run away with an awful deal of money. Perhaps the only person in all Prior's Ash who believed George Godolphin to be a saint, or next door to one, was Maria. Best that she should think so. But, extravagant as George was, the suspicion that he lived beyond his income was never glanced at. Sober people, such as the Rector of All Souls' and Mrs. Hastings, would say in private what a pity it was that George did not think of saving for his family. Ample as the income, present and future, arising from the bank might be, it could not be undesirable to know that a nest-egg was accumulating. Thomas might have suggested this to George: gossips surmised that he did so, and that George let the suggestion go for nothing. They were wrong. Whatever lectures Janet may have seen fit to give him, Thomas gave him none. Thomas was not one to interfere or play the mentor: and Thomas had a strong silent conviction within him that ere very long George would come into Ashlydyat. The

conviction was born of his inward feelings, of his suspected state of health. He might be wrong; but he believed he was not. Ashlydyat George's; the double income from the bank George's,—where was the need to tell him now to save?"

The Reverend Mr. Hastings had had some trouble with his boys: inasmuch that they had turned their faces against the career he had marked out for them. Isaac, the eldest, destined for the church, had declined to qualify himself for it when he came to years of discretion. After some uncertainty, and what Mr. Hastings called "knocking about,"—which meant that he was doing nothing when he ought to have been at work; and that state of affairs lasted for a year or two,—Isaac won Maria over to his side. Maria, in her turn, won over George; and Isaac was admitted to the bank. He held a good post in it now: the brother of Mrs. George Godolphin was not left to rise by chance or priority. A handsome young man of three-and-twenty was he; steady; and displaying an aptitude for business beyond his years. Many a one deemed that Isaac Hastings, in a worldly point of view, had done well in quitting the uncertain prospects offered by the church, for a clerkship in the house of Godolphin. He might rise sometime to be a partner in it. Reginald had also declined the career marked out for him. Some government appointment had been promised him,—in fact, had been given him,—but Reginald would hear of nothing but the sea. It angered Mr. Hastings much. One of the last men was he to force a boy into the Church; nay, to allow a boy to enter it unless he evinced a special liking for it; therefore Isaac had, on that score, got off pretty free: but he was not one of the last men to force a boy to work who displayed a taste for idleness. Reginald argued that he should lead a far more idle life in a government office than he should have a chance of doing if he went to sea. He was right so far. Mrs. Hastings had a special hor-

ror of the sea. Mothers, as a general rule, have. She set her face—and Mr. Hastings had also set his—against Reginald's sea-visions,—which, truth to say, had commenced with his earliest years.

However, Reginald and inclination proved too strong for the opposition. The government post had to be declined with thanks; and to sea he went. Not into the navy,—the boy had become too old for it: but into the merchant service,—a good service, the house he entered, but a very expensive one. The premium was high; the outfit was high; the yearly sum that went in expenses while he was, what is called, a midshipman, was high. Mr. Hastings remonstrated as to the latter. Reginald replied that he must have what the other middies had, and do as they did. He continued also to get through a tolerable account of petty sums on his private score, which Mr. Hastings had to make good. Altogether Reginald was a great expense. Harry was keeping his first term at College. He had chosen the Church of his own free-will: and was qualifying for it. Grace was married. And Rose was growing up to be as pretty as Maria.

"Maria," cried Mrs. Hastings, "if I am to go out with you to-day, why should we not call upon Mrs. Averil? I have been wanting to see her for some time."

"I will call with pleasure," was Maria's answer. "As well go a long drive as a short one. Then we should start at once."

She rang the bell as she spoke,—to order the carriage, and for Margery to come and take Miss Meta. The latter, who had played the trick before, suddenly broke from Margery, and dashed into the bank-parlor. She had learned to open the door.

George by good-luck happened to be alone. He affected great anger, and Margery also scolded sharply. George had been sitting at a table, bending over account-books, his spirit weary, his brow knit. His assumed anger did not tell: for he caught up

the child the next moment and covered her face with kisses. Then he carried her into the dining-room to Maria.

"What am I to do with this naughty child, mamma? She came bursting in upon me like a great fierce lion. I must buy a real lion and keep him in the closet, and let him loose if she does it again. Meta won't like to be eaten up."

Meta laughed confidently. "Papa won't let a lion touch Meta."

"You saucy child!" But George's punishment consisted only of more kisses.

"We are going to call on Mrs. Averil, George," said Maria. "Can you accompany us? It is a long while since you were there, and you know how pleased she would be to see you."

"I can't," replied George. "Thomas has not come this morning."

His wife looked at him wistfully,—a look which seemed to say she thought he might come if he would. George answered it.

"It's quite impossible, Maria. Thomas has not been with us so much of late. I suppose he thinks that I, being the youngest, should take the manager's share of work. Is Meta going?"

Maria had not intended that she should go. She glanced towards the child with indecision. Margery, who was in the habit of saying pretty much what she choose, put in her word.

"If you go without the child, ma'am, Mrs. Averil will not thank you. Don't you remember, last time, telling me that she cried over it, because Miss Meta was not taken? I think the wishes of the sick should be studied a bit."

"If I take Meta I must take you also, Margery; for I cannot have the trouble of her in the carriage."

"I shan't hinder," was Margery's response. "My bonnet and shawl's soon clapped on. Come along, child. I'll dress you at once."

She went off with Meta, waiting for no further permission. George stepped out on the terrace, to see what Jonathan and David were about. Maria took the opportunity to tell him of

the sixty pounds which had come to old Jekyl, and that she had advised its being brought to the bank to be taken care of.

"What money is it? Where does it come from?" inquired George, of the men.

"It's the money, sir, as were left to father this three year ago, from that rich uncle of ourn," returned Jonathan. "But the lawyers, sir, they couldn't agree, and it was never paid over. Now there have been a trial over it, something about the will; and father have had notice that it's ready for him,—all the sixty pound."

"We will take care of it for him, and pay him interest if he chooses to leave it here," said George.

"I'll tell him safe enough, sir. He's sure to bring it."

The carriage was at the door in due course, and they were ready for it,—a handsome carriage, acknowledged to be so by even Mrs. Hastings. George came out to hand them in. Miss Meta, like a pretty little dressed-up fairy; Margery, plain and old-fashioned; Mrs. Hastings, quiet and ladylike; Maria, beautiful. Her hand lingered in her husband's.

"I wish you were coming, George," she bent from the carriage to whisper.

"It must wait for another time, my dearest."

Although nearly seven years a wife, the world still contained no idol for Maria like George Godolphin. She loved, respected, revered him. Nothing, as yet, had shaken her faith in her husband. The little tales, making free with Mr. George's name, which would now and then be flying about Prior's Ash, never reached the ears of Maria.

They had a seven-mile drive. The Honorable Mrs. Averil, who was growing in years, and had become an invalid, was delighted to see them. She kept them for two or three hours, and wanted to keep them for the day. It was late in the afternoon when they returned to Prior's Ash.

They met a cavalcade on entering the town,—a riding-party, consisting

of several ladies and one or two gentlemen, followed by some grooms. Somewhat apart from the rest, midway between the party and the grooms, rode two abreast, laughing, animated, upon the best of terms with each other. The lady sat her horse unusually well. She was slightly larger, but not a whit less handsome, than on the day you first saw her, at the meet of the hounds,—Charlotte Pain. He, gay George,—for it was no other,—was riding carelessly, half turning on his horse, his fair curls bending towards Charlotte.

"Papa! papa!" shrieked out Meta, joyously.

George turned hastily, but the carriage had then passed. So occupied had he been, making himself agreeable, that he had positively not seen it. Charlotte had. Charlotte had bowed,—bowed to Maria with a look of cool assurance, of triumph—as much as to say, You are sitting alone, and your husband is with me: at least, it might have worn that appearance to one given to flights of fancy, which Maria was not, and she returned the bow with a pleasant smile. She caught George's eye when he turned, and a flush of pleasure lighted her face. George nodded to her cordially, and raised his hat, sending back a smile at the idea of his not having seen her.

"It was papa, was it not, darling?" said Maria, gleefully, bending over to her little girl.

But Maria did not notice that Margery's head had given itself a peculiar toss at sight of George's companion; or that a severe expression had crossed the face of Mrs. Hastings,—an expression which she instantly smoothed, lest Maria should see it.

The fact was, that gossiping Prior's Ash had for some time coupled together the names of George Godolphin and Charlotte Pain, in its usual free manner. No need, one would think, for Mrs. Hastings or Margery to pay heed to such tattle: for they knew well what half the stories of Prior's Ash were worth.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHY DID IT ANGER HIM?

THE drawing-rooms at Lady Godolphin's Folly were teeming with light, with noise, with company. The Verralls lived in it yet. Lady Godolphin had never given them their dismissal: but they did not spend so much time in it as formerly. London, or elsewhere, appeared to claim them for the greater portion of the year. One year they did not come to it at all. Sometimes only Mrs. Verrall would be sojourning at it,—her husband away. Indeed, their residence there was most irregular. Mrs. Verrall was away at present,—it was said at the sea-side.

A dinner-party had taken place that day,—a gentleman's party. It was not often that Mr. Verrall gave one: but when he did, it was thoroughly well done. George Godolphin did not give better dinners than did Mr. Verrall. The only promised guest who had failed in his attendance was Thomas Godolphin. Very rarely indeed did he accept of the invitations to the Folly. If there was one man in all the county to whom Mr. Verrall seemed inclined to pay court, to treat with marked consideration and respect, that man was Thomas Godolphin. Thomas nearly always declined, declined courtously, in a manner which could not afford the slightest loophole for offence. He was of quiet habits, not strong in health of late, and though he had to give dinner-parties himself and attend some of George's in the way of business, his friends nearly all were kind enough to excuse his frequenting theirs in return.

This time, however, Thomas Godolphin had yielded to Mr. Verrall's pressing entreaties, made in person, and promised to be present,—a promise which was not—as it proved—to be kept. All the rest of the guests had assembled, and they were only waiting the appearance of Mr. Godolphin to sit down, when a hasty note arrived from Janet. Mr. Godolphin had been taken ill in dressing, and

was entirely unable to attend. So they dined without him.

The dinner was over now. And the guests, most of them, had gone to the drawing-rooms,—teeming, I say, then, with light, with the hum of many voices, with heat. A few had gone home; a few had taken cigars and were strolling outside the dining-room windows in the bright moonlight: some were taking coffee; and some were flirting with Charlotte Pain.

Mrs. Pain now, you remember. But Charlotte has worn weeds for her husband since you last saw her, and is free again. About four years after their marriage, the death of Rodolf Pain appeared in the county papers. None of the Verralls were at the Folly at the time; but Charlotte, in her widow's dress, came to it almost immediately afterwards, to sob out her sorrow in retirement. Charlotte emerged from her widowhood gayer than ever. She rode more horses, she kept more dogs, she astonished Prior's Ash with her extraordinary mode of attire, she was altogether "faster" than ever. Charlotte had never once visited the neighborhood during her married life; but she appeared to be inclined to make up for it now, for she chiefly stayed at it. When the Verralls, one or both, would be away, Charlotte remained at the Folly, its mistress. She held her court; she gave entertainments; she visited on her own score. Rumor went that Mrs. Pain had been left very well off: that she shared with Mr. Verrall the expense of the Folly.

Charlotte managed to steer tolerably clear of ill-natured tongues. Latterly, indeed, people had got to say that Mr. George Godolphin was at the Folly more than he need be. But, it was certain that George and Mr. Verrall were upon most intimate terms: and Mr. Verrall had been staying at the Folly a good deal of late. George of course would have said that his visits there were paid to Mr. Verrall. Charlotte was popular in the neighborhood, rather than otherwise; with the ladies as well as with the gentlemen.

Resplendent is Charlotte to-night in a white-silk dress with silver spots upon it. It is a really beautiful dress; but, one of a quieter kind would have been more suitable for this occasion. Charlotte had not, of course, appeared at the dinner, and there was not the least necessity for her to embellish herself in this manner to receive them in the drawing-room. Charlotte was one, however, who did as she pleased in the matter of dress, as in other things,—setting custom and opinion at defiance. Her hair is taken from her face and wound round and round her head artistically, in conjunction with a white and silver wreath. White and silver ornaments are on her neck and arms, and a choice bouquet of white hot-house flowers serves her to toy with. Just now, however, the bouquet is discarded, and lies on the table near her elbow, for her elbow is resting there as she sits. She is coquetting with a white and silver fan, gently wafting it before her face, her sparkling eyes glancing over its rim at a gentleman, who stands, coffee-cup in hand, bending down to her.

It is not George Godolphin. So do not let your imagination run off to him. For all the world saw George and Charlotte were as decorous of behavior with each other as need be: and where Prior's Ash was picking up its ill-natured scandal from, Prior's Ash best knew. Others talked and laughed with Charlotte as much as George did; rode with her, admired her.

The gentleman, bending down to her now, appears to admire her,—a tall, handsome man of eight-and-thirty years, with clearly cut features, and dark luminous eyes. He is the nephew of that Mrs. Averil to whom Maria and Mrs. Hastings went to pay a visit. He has been away from the neighborhood, until recently, for nearly three years; and this is the first time he has seen Charlotte at Prior's Ash since she was Miss Pain.

What does Charlotte promise to herself by thus flirting with him—by laying her charms out to attract him?—as she is evidently doing. Is she

thinking to make a second marriage? to win him, as she once thought to win George Godolphin? Scarcely. One gentleman in the vicinity, who had thrown himself and his fortune at Charlotte's feet—and, neither fortune nor gentleman could be reckoned despicable—had been rejected with an assurance that she should never marry again; and she spoke it with an earnestness that left no doubt of her sincerity. Charlotte liked her own liberty too well. She was no doubt perfectly aware that every husband would not feel inclined to accord it to her so entirely as had poor Rodolf Pain. He—the one with the coffee-cup, talking to her—is plunging into a sea of blunders,—as you may hear speedily, if you listen to what he is saying.

"Yes, I have come back to find many things changed," he was observing; "things and people. Time, though but in a three-years' flight, leaves its mark behind it, Mrs. Pain. If you will allow me to remark it, I would say that you are nearly the only one whom it has not changed—save for the better."

"Your lordship has not forgotten your talent for flattery, I perceive," was Charlotte's rejoinder.

"Nay, but I speak with no flattery; I mean what I say," was the peer's reply, given in an earnest spirit. He was an admirer of beauty; he admired Charlotte's; but to flatter was one of the failings of Lord Averil. Neither had he any ulterior view, save that of passing ten minutes of the evening agreeably with Charlotte's help, ere he took his departure. If Charlotte thought he had, she was mistaken. Lord Averil's affections and hopes were given to one very different from Charlotte Pain.

"But it must be considerably more than three years since I saw you," resumed Lord Averil. "It must be—I should think—nearer seven. You did not return to Prior's Ash—if I remember rightly—after you left it on your marriage."

"I did not return to it," replied

Charlotte: "but you have seen me since then, Lord Averil. Ah! your memory is treacherous. Don't you recollect accosting me in Rotten Row? It was soon after you lost your wife."

Did Charlotte intend that as a shaft? Lord Averil's cheek burnt as he endeavored to recall the reminiscence. "I think I remember it," he slowly said. "It was the spring following your marriage. Yes, I do remember it," he added after a pause. "You were riding with a young, fair man. And—did you not—really I beg your pardon if I am wrong—did you not introduce him to me as Mr. Pain?"

"It was Mr. Pain," replied Charlotte. "I hope he is well. He is not here probably? I did not see him at table, I think."

Charlotte's face—I mean its complexion—was got up in the fashion. But the crimson color that suffused it would have penetrated all the powder and cosmetics extant, let them have been laid on ever so profusely. She was really agitated: could not for the time speak. Another moment, and she turned deadly pale. Let us admire her, at any rate, for this feeling shown to her departed husband.

"My husband is dead, Lord Averil." Lord Averil felt shocked at his blunder. "You must forgive me, Mrs. Pain," he said, in a gentle voice, his tone, his manner evincing the deepest sympathy. "I had no idea of it. No one has mentioned it to me since my return. The loss, I infer, cannot be a very recent one."

In point of fact, Mr. Pain's demise had occurred immediately after the departure of Lord Averil from England. Charlotte is telling him so. It could not, she thinks, have been more than a week or two subsequent to it.

"Then he could not have been ill long," remarked his lordship. "What was the cause——"

"Oh, pray do not make me recall it!" interrupted Charlotte, in a tone of pain. "He died suddenly: but—it was altogether very distressing. Distressing to me, and distressing in its attendant circumstances."

An idea flashed over the mind of Lord Averil that the circumstances of the death must have been peculiar: in short, that Mr. Pain might have committed suicide. If he was wrong, Charlotte's manner was to blame. It was from that he gathered the thought that the subject was a most unwelcome one, there could be no doubt: she palpably shrank from it.

Murmuring again a few clear words of considerate apology, Lord Averil changed the conversation, and presently said adieu to Charlotte.

"You surely are not thinking of going yet?" cried Charlotte, retaining his hand, and recovering all her light-headedness. "They are setting out the whist-tables."

"I do not play. I have a visit to pay yet to a sick friend," he added, glancing at his watch. "I shall be in time."

"But I do not think your carriage is here," urged Charlotte, who would fain have detained him.

"I am sure it is not here," was the peer's answer. "I did not order it to come. It is a fine night, and I shall walk to Prior's Ash."

He looked round for Mr. Verrall. He could not see him. In at one room, in at another, looked he; out upon the terrace, away before the dining-room window amidst the smokers. But there was no Mr. Verrall: and Lord Averil, impatient to be gone, finally departed without wishing his host good-night.

Mr. Verrall had strolled out into the moonlight, and was in low, earnest conversation with George Godolphin. They had got as far as that stream on which you saw George rowing the day of Mrs. Verrall's fête, when he so nearly caught his death. Standing on the arched wooden bridge, which crossed it to the mock island, they leaned forward, their arms on its rails. Mr. Verrall was smoking: George Godolphin appeared to be too ill at ease to smoke. His brow was knit; his face hot with care. As fast as he wiped the drops from his brow they gathered there again.

"Don't worry, lad," said Mr. Verrall. "It always has come right, and it will come right now. Never fear. You will receive news from London to-morrow; there's little doubt of it."

"But it ought to have come to-day, Verrall."

"It will come to-morrow safe enough. And—you know that you may always count upon me."

"I know I may. But look at the awful cost, Verrall."

"Pooh, pooh! What has put you in this mood to-night?"

"I don't know," said George, wringing the damp from his brow. "The net hearing from town, I think. Verrall?"

"What?"

"Suppose, when I do, hear, it should not be favorable? I feel in a fever when I think of it."

"You took too much of that heating port this evening," said Mr. Verrall.

"I dare say I did," returned George. "A man at ease may let the wine pass him: but one, worried to death, is glad of it to drown care."

"Worried to death!" repeated Mr. Verrall, in a reproving tone.

"It's next door to it. Look there! they have tracked us and are coming in search."

Two or three dark forms were discerned in the distance, nearer the Folly. Mr. Verrall passed his arm within George Godolphin's and led him towards the house.

"I think I'll go home," said George. "I am not company for a dog to-night."

"Nonsense," said Mr. Verrall. "The tables are ready. I want to give you your revenge."

For once in his life—and it was a notable exception—George Godolphin actually resisted the temptation of the "tables:" of the chance of "revenge." He had a heavy trouble upon him; a great fear; perhaps more than Mr. Verrall knew of. Ay, he had! But who would have suspected it of gay, careless George, who had been so brilliant at the dinner-table? He

foreswore for that one night the attractions of the Folly, including syren Charlotte, and went straight home.

It was not much past ten when he reached the bank. Maria was astonished: the Verrall dinner-parties were generally late affairs. She was sitting alone, reading. In her glad surprise she ran to him with an exclamation of welcome.

George pressed her tenderly to him, and his manner was gay and careless again. Whatever scandal Prior's Ash might choose to talk of George, he had not yet begun to neglect his wife.

"It was rather humdrum, darling, and I got tired," he said in answer to her questions. "What have you been doing with yourself? Have you been alone all the evening?"

"Since mamma left. She went home after tea. George, I want to tell you something mamma has been talking of,—has been suggesting."

George stretched himself on the sofa, as if he were weary. Maria edged herself on to it, and sat facing him, holding his hand while she talked.

"It was the new carriage that brought the subject up, George. Mamma introduced it this morning. She says we are living at too great an expense; that we ought not to spend more than half what we do——"

"What?" shouted George, starting up from the sofa as if he had been electrified.

Maria felt electrified,—electrified by the sudden movement, the word, the tone of anger. Nay, it was not anger alone that it bore, but dismay; fear—she could hardly tell its sound. "George," she gasped, "what is the matter?"

"Tell me what it is that Mrs. Hastings has been saying."

"George, I think you must have mistaken my words," was all that Maria could reply in the first moment, feeling truly uncomfortable. "Mamma said this morning that it was a pity that we did not live at less expense, and save money; that it would be desirable for the sake of Meta and

any other children we may have. I said I thought it would be desirable, and that I would suggest it to you. That was all."

George gazed at Maria searchingly for the space of a minute or two. "Has Prior's Ash been saying this?"

"Oh no."

"Good. Tell Mrs. Hastings, Maria, that we are capable of regulating our own affairs without interference. I do not desire it, nor will I admit it."

Maria sat down to the table with her book,—the one she had been reading when George came in. She put her hands up, as if absorbed in reading, but her tears were dropping. She had never had an ill word with her husband; had never had any symptom of estrangement with him; and she could not bear this. George lay on the sofa, his lips compressed. Maria rose up, in her loving, affectionate nature, and stood before him.

"George, I am sure mamma never meant to interfere; she would not do such a thing. What she said arose from anxiety for our interests. I am so sorry to have offended you," she added, the tears falling fast.

A repentant fit had come over him. He drew his wife's face down on his own and kissed its tears away. "Forgive me, my dearest; I was wrong to speak crossly to you. A splitting headache has put me out of sorts, and I was vexed to hear that people were commenting on our private affairs. Nothing could annoy me half so much."

Maria wondered why. But she fully resolved that it should be the last time she would hint at such a thing as economy. Of course her husband knew his own business best.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CECIL'S ROMANCE.

WE must turn to Ashlydyat, and go back to a little earlier in the evening. Miss Godolphin's note to the

Folly had stated that her brother had been taken ill while dressing for Mr. Verrall's dinner. It was correct. Thomas Godolphin was alone in his room, ready, all but his coat, when he was attacked by a sharp, internal pain of agony. He hastily sat down,—a cry escaping his lips, and drops of water gathering on his brow.

Alone he bore it, calling for no aid. In a few minutes the paroxysm had partially passed, and he rang for his servant,—an old man now, that servant: he had for years attended on Sir George Godolphin.

"Bexley, I have been ill again," said Thomas, quietly. "Will you ask Miss Godolphin to write a line to Mr. Verrall, saying that I am unable to attend?"

Bexley cast a strangely yearning look on the pale, suffering face of his master. He had seen him in these paroxysms of pain once or twice. "I wish you would have Mr. Snow called in, sir!" he cried.

"I think I shall. He may give me some ease, possibly. Take my message to your mistress, Bexley."

The effect of the message was to bring Janet to the room. "Taken ill! a sharp inward pain!" she was repeating, after Bexley. "Thomas, what sort of a pain is it? It seems to me that you have had the same before, lately."

"Write a few words the first thing, will you, Janet. I should not like to keep them waiting for me."

Janet, punctilious as Thomas, considerate as he was for the convenience of others, sat down and wrote the note, despatching it at once by Andrew, one of the serving-men. Few might have set about and done it so calmly as Janet, considering that she had a great fear thumping at her heart,—a fear which had never penetrated it until this moment. With something very like sickness, had flashed into her memory their mother's pain. A sharp, agonizing pain had occasionally attacked her, the symptom of the inward malady of which she had died. Was the same fatal malady attacking

Thomas? The doctors had expressed their fears then that it might prove hereditary.

In the corridor, as Janet was going back to Thomas's room, the note written, she encountered Bexley. The sad apprehensive look in the old man's face struck her. She touched his arm, and beckoned him into an empty room.

"What is it that is the matter with your master?"

"I don't know," was the answer: but the words were spoken in a tone which caused Janet to think that the old man was awake to the same fears that she was. "Miss Janet, I am afraid to think what it may be."

"Is he often ill like this?"

"I know but of a time or two, ma'am. But that's a time or two too many."

Janet returned to the room. Thomas was leaning back in his chair, his face ghastly, his hands fallen, prostrate altogether with the effects of the pain. If a momentary thought had crossed Janet that he might have written the note himself, it left her now. Things were coming into her mind one by one: how much time Thomas had spent in his own room of late; how seldom, comparatively speaking, he went to the bank; how often he had the brougham, instead of walking, when he did go to it. Once—why it was only this very last Sunday!—he had not gone near church all day long. Janet's fears grew into certainties.

She took a chair, drawing it near to Thomas. Not speaking of her fears, but asking him in an agreeable tone how he felt, and what had caused his illness. "Have you had the same pain before?" she continued.

"Several times," he answered.

"But it has been worse to-night than I had previously felt it. Janet, I fear it may be the forerunner of my call. I did not think to leave you so soon."

Except that Janet's face went nearly as pale as his, and that her fingers entwined themselves together so tightly as to cause pain, there was no outward

sign of the grief that laid hold of her heart.

"Thomas, what is the complaint that you are fearing?" she asked, after a pause. "The same that—that—"

"That my mother had," he quietly answered, speaking the words that Janet would not speak.

"It may not be so," gasped Janet.

"True. But I think it is."

"Why have you never spoken of this?"

"Because, until to-night, I have doubted whether it was so, or not. The suspicion, that it might be so, certainly was upon me: but it amounted to no more than a suspicion. At times, when I feel quite well, I argue that I must be wrong."

"Have you consulted Mr. Snow?"

"I am going to do so now. I have desired Bexley to send for him."

"It should have been done before, Thomas."

"Why? If it is as I suspect, neither Snow nor all his brethren can save me."

Janet clasped her hands upon her knee, and sat with her head bent. She was feeling the communication in all its bitter force. It seemed that the only one left on earth with whom she could sympathize, was Thomas: and now perhaps he was going! Bessy, George, Cecil, all were younger, all had their own pursuits and interests, George had his new ties; but she and Thomas seemed to stand alone. With the deep sorrow for him, the brother whom she dearly loved, came other considerations, impossible not to occur to a practical, foreseeing mind like Janet's. With Thomas they should lose Ashlydyat. George would come into possession: and George's ways were so different from theirs that it would seem to be no longer in the family. What would George make of it? A gay, ever-filled place, like the Verralls—when they were at home—made of Lady Godolphin's Folly? Janet's cheeks flushed at the idea of such degeneracy for stately Ashlydyat. However it might be, whether George turned it into an ever-open house, or

shut it up as a nunnery, it would be alike lost to all the rest of them. She and her sisters must turn from it once again and forever; George, his wife, and his children, would reign.

Janet Godolphin did not rebel at this; she would not have had it otherwise. Failing Thomas, George was the fit and proper representative of Ashlydyat. But the fact could but strike upon her now with gloom. All things wore a gloomy hue to her in that unhappy moment.

It would cause changes at the bank, too. At least, Janet thought it probable that it might. Could George carry on that extensive concern himself? Would the public be satisfied with gay George for its sole head?—would they accord him the confidence they had given Thomas? These old retainers, too! If they left Ashlydyat, they must part with them: leave them to serve George.

Such considerations passed rapidly through her imagination. It could not well be otherwise. Would they really come to pass? She looked at Thomas, as if seeking in his face the answer to the doubt.

His elbow on the arm of his chair, and his temples pressed upon his hand, sat Thomas,—his mind in as deep a reverie as was Janet's. Where was it straying to? To the remembrance of Ethel?—of the day that he had stood over her grave when they were placing her in it? Was the time indeed come, or nearly come, to which he had from that time looked forward?—the time of his joining her? He had never lost the vista: and perhaps the fiat, death, could have come to few who would meet it so serenely as Thomas Godolphin. It would scarcely be right to say *welcome* it; but, certain it was, that the prospect was one of pleasantness rather than pain to him. To one who has lived near to God on earth, the anticipation of the great change can bring no dismay. It brought none to Thomas Godolphin.

But Thomas Godolphin had not done with earth and its cares yet.

Bessy Godolphin was away from home that week. She had gone to spend it with some friends at a few miles' distance. Cecil was alone when Janet returned to the drawing-room. She had no suspicion of the sorrow that was overhanging the house. She has not seen Thomas go to the Folly, and felt surprised at his tardiness.

"How late he will be, Janet!"

"Who? Thomas! He is not going. He is not very well this evening," was the reply.

Cecil thought nothing of it. How should she? Janet buried her fears within her, and said no more.

One was to dine at Lady Godolphin's Folly that night who absorbed all Cecil's thoughts. Cecil Godolphin had had her romance in life,—as so many have it. It had been partially played out years ago. Not quite. Its sequel had to come. She sat there listlessly,—her pretty hands resting inertly on her knee, her beautiful face tinged with the setting sunlight,—sat there thinking of him,—Lord Averil.

A romance it had really been. Cecil Godolphin had paid a long visit to the Honorable Mrs. Averil some three or four years ago. She, Mrs. Averil, was in health then, fond of gayety, and her house had many visitors. Amidst others, staying there, was Lord Averil; and before he and Cecil knew well what they were about, they had learned to love. Lord Averil was the first to awake from the pleasant dream,—to know what it meant,—and he discreetly withdrew himself out of harm's way,—harm only to himself, as he supposed: he never suspected that the like love had won its way to Cecil Godolphin,—a strictly honorable man, he would have been fit to kill himself in self-condemnation had he suspected that it had. Not until he had gone, did it come out to Cecil that he was a married man. When only eighteen years of age, he had been drawn into one of those unequal and unhappy alliances that can only bring a flush to the brow in after years. Many a hundred times had it

dyed that of Lord Averil. Before he was twenty years of age he had separated from his wife,—when pretty Cecil was yet a child,—and the next ten years he spent abroad, striving to overget its remembrance. His own family, you may be sure, did not pain him by alluding to it then or after his return. He had no residence in the neighborhood of Prior's Ash. When he visited it, it was chiefly as the guest of Colonel Max, the master of the fox-hounds: and that was the way that he had made the acquaintance of Charlotte Pain. Thus it happened, when Cecil met him at Mrs. Averil's she knew nothing of his being a married man. On Mrs. Averil's part, she never supposed that Cecil did not know it. Lord Averil supposed she knew it: and little enough, in his own eyes, has he looked in her presence, when the thought would flash over him, "How she must despise me for my mad folly!" He had learned to love her,—to love her passionately,—never so much as glancing at the thought that it could be reciprocated. He, a married man! But this was no less mad folly than the other had been, and Lord Averil had the sense to move himself away.

A day or two after his departure, Mrs. Averil received a letter from him. Cecil was in her dressing-room when she read it.

"How strange!" was the comment of Mrs. Averil. "What do you think, Cecil?" she added, lowering her voice. "When he got to town there was a communication waiting at his house for him, saying that his wife was dying, and praying him to go and see her."

"His wife?" echoed Cecil. "Whose wife?"

"Lord Averil's. Have you forgotten that he had a wife? I wish we could all really forget it. It has been the blight upon his life."

Cecil had discretion enough left in that unhappy moment not to betray that she had been ignorant of the fact. When her burning cheeks had a little cooled, she turned from the window

where she had been hiding them, and escaped to her own room. The revelation had betrayed to her the secret of her own feelings for Lord Averil; and, in her pride and rectitude, she thought she should have died.

A day or two more, and Lord Averil was a widower. He suffered some months to elapse, and then came to Prior's Ash, his object being Cecil Godolphin. He stayed at an hotel, and was a frequent visitor at Ashlydyat. Cecil believed that he meant to ask her to be his wife: and Cecil was not wrong. She could give herself up now to the full joy of loving him.

Busy tongues, belonging to some young ladies who could boast more wit than discretion, hinted something of this to Cecil. Cecil, in her vexation at having her private feelings suspected, spoke slightly of Lord Averil. Did they think *she* would stoop to a widower,—to one who had made himself so notorious by his first marriage?—she asked. And this, word for word, was repeated to Lord Averil.

It was repeated to him by those false friends, and Cecil's haughty manner, as she spoke it, offensively commented upon. Lord Averil believed it fully. He judged that he had no chance with Cecil Godolphin; and, without speaking to her of what had been his intentions, he again left.

But now, no suspicion of this conversation having been repeated to him, ever reached Cecil. She deemed his behavior very bad. Whatever restraint he may have laid upon his manners towards her when at Mrs. Averil's, he had been open enough since: and Cecil could only believe his conduct unjustifiable, the result of fickleness. She resolved to forget him.

But she had not done it yet. All this long while since, between two and three years, had Cecil been trying at it, and it was not yet accomplished. She had received an offer from a young and handsome earl; it would have been a match every way desirable:

but poor Cecil found that Lord Averil was too deeply seated in her heart for her to admit thought of another. And now Lord Averil was back at Prior's Ash; and, as Cecil had heard, was to dine that day at Lady Godolphin's Folly. He had called at Ashlydyat since his return, but she was out.

She sat there thinking of him: her prominent feeling against him being anger. She believed to this hour that he had used her ill,—that his behavior had been unbecoming a gentleman.

Her reflections were disturbed by the sight of Mr. Snow. It was growing dusk then, and she wondered what brought him there so late,—in fact, what brought him there at all. She turned and asked the question of Janet.

"He has come to see Thomas," replied Janet. And Cecil noticed that her sister was sitting in a strangely still attitude, her head bowed down. But she did not connect it with its true cause. It was nothing unusual to see Janet lost in deep thought.

"What is the matter with Thomas, that Mr. Snow should come?" inquired Cecil.

"He did not feel well, and sent for him."

It was all that Janet answered. And Cecil continued in blissful ignorance of any thing being wrong, and resumed her reflections on Lord Averil.

Janet saw Mr. Snow before he went away. Afterwards she went to Thomas's room and remained in it. Cecil stayed in the drawing-room, buried in her dream. The room was lighted, but the blinds were not drawn down: Cecil was at the window, looking forth into the bright moonlight.

It must have been getting quite late when she discerned some one approaching Ashlydyat, on the road from Lady Godolphin's Folly. From the height, she fancied at first that it might be George; but as the figure drew nearer, her heart gave a great bound, and she saw that it was he upon whom her thoughts had been fixed.

Yes, it was Lord Averil. When

he mentioned to Charlotte Pain that he had a visit yet to pay to a sick friend, he had alluded to Thomas Godolphin. Lord Averil, since his return, had been struck with the change in Thomas Godolphin. It was more perceptible to him than to those who saw Thomas habitually. And when the apology came for Mr. Godolphin's absence, Lord Averil determined to call upon him that night. Though, in talking to Mrs. Pain, he nearly let the time for it slip by.

Cecil rose up when he entered. In broad day he might have seen, beyond doubt, her changing face, telling of emotion. Was he mistaken, in fancying that she was agitated? His pulses quickened at the thought: for Cecil was as dear to him as she had ever been.

"Will you pardon my intrusion at this hour?" he asked, taking her hand, and bending towards her with his sweet smile. "It is later than I thought it was,"—in truth, ten was striking that moment from the hall-clock. "I was concerned to hear of Mr. Godolphin's illness, and wished to ascertain how he was, before returning to Prior's Ash."

"He has kept his room this evening," replied Cecil. "My sister is sitting with him. I do not think it is any thing serious. But he has not appeared very well of late."

"Indeed, I trust it is nothing serious," warmly responded Lord Averil.

Cecil fell into silence. She supposed they had told Janet of the visit, and that she would be coming in. Lord Averil went to the window.

"The same charming scene!" he exclaimed. "I think the moonlight view from this window beautiful. The dark trees around, and the white walls of Lady Godolphin's Folly, rising there, remain on my memory like the scene of an old painting."

He folded his arms and stood there, gazing still. Cecil stole a look up at him,—at his pale, attractive face, with its expression of care. She had wondered once why that look of care should be conspicuous there: but not

after she became acquainted with his domestic history.

"Have you returned to England to remain, Lord Averil?"

The question awoke him from his reverie. He turned to Cecil, and a sudden impulse prompted him to stake his fate on the die of the moment. It was not a lucky throw.

"I would remain if I could induce one to share my name and home. Forgive me, Cecil, if I anger you by thus hastily speaking. Will you forget the past, and help me to forget it?—will you let me make you my dear wife?"

In saying "Will you forget the past," Lord Averil had alluded to his first marriage. In his extreme sensitiveness upon that point, he doubted whether Cecil might not object to succeed the dead Lady Averil: he believed those hasty and ill-natured words, reported to him as having been spoken by her, bore upon that sore point alone. Cecil, on the contrary, assumed that her forgetfulness was asked for his own behavior to her, in so far that he had gone away and left her without a word of explanation. She grew quite pale with anger. Lord Averil resumed, his manner earnest, his voice low and tender.

"I have loved you Cecil, from the first day that I saw you at Mrs. Averil's. I dragged myself away from the place, because I loved you, fearing lest you might come to see my folly. It was worse than folly then, for I was not a free man. I have gone on loving you more and more, from that time to this. I went abroad this last time hoping to forget you; striving to forget you: but I cannot do it, and the love has only become stronger. Forgive, I say, my urging it upon you in this moment of impulse."

Poor Cecil was all at sea. "Went abroad hoping to forget her, striving to forget her!" It was worse and worse. She flung his hand away.

"Oh, Cecil! can you not love me?" he exclaimed, in agitation. "Will you not give me hopes that you will sometime be my wife?"

"No, I cannot love you. I will not give you hopes. I would rather marry any one in the world than you. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Lord Averil!"

Not a very dignified rejoinder. And Cecil, what with anger, what with love, burst into even less dignified tears, and quitted the room in a passion. Lord Averil bit his lips to pain.

Janet entered, unsuspecting. He turned from the window, and smoothed his brow, gathering what equanimity he could, as he proceeded to inquire after Mr. Godolphin.

CHAPTER XXVIII

CHARLOTTE PAIN'S "TURN-OUT."

A *STYLISH* vehicle, high enough for a fire-escape, its green wheels picked out with gleaming red, was dashing up the street of Prior's Ash. A lady was seated in it, driving its pair of blood-horses, whose restive mettle appeared more fit for a man's guidance than a woman's. You need not be told that it was Charlotte Pain: nobody else of her sex in Prior's Ash would have driven such a turn-out. Prior's Ash, rather at a loss what name to give it, for the like of it had never been seen in that sober place, christened it "Mrs. Pain's turn-out:" so, if you grumble at the name, you must grumble at them, not at me.

Past the bank it flew; when, as if a sudden thought appeared to take the driver, it suddenly whirled round, to the imminent danger of the street in general, retraced its steps past the bank, dashed round the corner of Crosse Street, and drew up at the entrance to Mr. George Godolphin's. The servant sprang from the seat behind.

"Inquire if Mrs. George Godolphin is within."

Mrs. George Godolphin was within, and Charlotte entered. Across the hall, up the handsome staircase, lined

with paintings, to the still more handsome drawing-room, swept she, conducted by a servant. Margery looked out at an opposite door, as Charlotte entered that of the drawing-room, her curious eyes taking in at a glance Charlotte's attire. Charlotte wore a handsome mauve brocaded skirt, trailing on the ground at the very least half a yard behind her, and a close habit body of mauve velvet. A black hat with a turned-up brim, and profusion of mauve feathers surmounted her head; and a little bit of gauze, mauve-colored also, came half-way down her face, fitting tight round the nose and cheeks.

Margery retired with a sniff. Had it been anybody she approved, any especial friend of her mistress's, she would have invited her into her mistress's presence, to the little sitting-room, where Maria was,—a pretty sitting-room, tastily furnished. The bed-room, dressing-room, and this sitting-room communicated with each other. Being who it was, Margery allowed the grand drawing-room the honor of receiving the visitor.

Maria sat at a table, her drawing materials before her. Miss Meta, perched in a high chair, was accommodated with a pencil and paper opposite. "It's Mrs. Pain in a mask," was the salutation of Margery.

Maria laid down her pencil. "Mrs. Pain in a mask!" she echoed.

"It looks like nothing else, ma'am, the thing she's got on," responded Margery. "I never saw Christian folks make themselves into such spectacles afore. It's to be hoped she won't go in that guise to call at Ashlydyat: Miss Janet would be for sending for the mad doctor."

Maria smiled. "You never admire Mrs. Pain's style of dress, Margery."

"It's not a taking one," rejoined Margery. "Honest faces would as soon see themselves standing out from a brass warming-pan, as with one of them brazen hats stuck atop of 'em."

Apart from her prejudices against Mrs. Pain,—whatever those prejudices might be,—it was evident that Mar-

gery did not admire the fashionable head-gear. Had Maria ventured to put one on, Margery would most probably have removed it from her head with her own fingers, and an intimation that it was not "proper." Maria moved to the door, and Miss Meta scrambled off her chair, to follow her. "Meta go too, mamma."

Margery caught the child up as if she were snatching her from a burning furnace, smothered her in her arms, and whispered unheard-of visions of immediate cakes and sweetmeats that were to be had by ascending to the nursery, and bore her away in triumph. Did she fear there was contamination for the child in Mrs. Pain's hat?

Maria not having observed the bit of by-play, proceeded to the presence of Charlotte. Not a greater contrast had there been between them in those old days at Broomhead, than there was now. Maria, the same quiet, essentially lady-like girl as of yore: she looked but a girl still, in her pretty dress of spring muslin. Charlotte was standing at the window, watching her restless horses, which the servant was driving about, from one street to the other, but could scarcely manage. She put back her hand to Maria.

"How are you to-day, Mrs. George Godolphin? Excuse my apparent rudeness: I am looking at my horses. If the man cannot keep them within bounds, I must go down myself."

Maria took her place by the side of Charlotte. The horses looked terrific animals to her eyes, very much inclined to kick the carriage to pieces and to bolt into the bank afterwards. "Did you drive them here?"

"Nobody else can drive them," replied Charlotte, with a laugh. "I should like to seduce Kate behind them some day when she is down here: she would be in a fit with fright before we were home again."

"How can you risk your own life, Mrs. Pain?"

"My life! that is a good joke," said Charlotte. "If I could not manage

the horses, I should not drive them. Did you notice the one I was riding yesterday, when you met me with your husband—a party of us together?"

"Not particularly," replied Maria. "It was just at the turn of the road, you know. I think I looked chiefly at George."

"You ought to have noticed my horse. You must see him another time. He is the most splendid animal,—down from London only the previous day. I rode him yesterday for the first time."

"I should not detect any of his beauties; I scarcely know one horse from another," acknowledged Maria.

"Ah! You are not particularly observant," returned Charlotte, in a good-humored tone of sarcasm. "The horse was a present to me. He cost a hundred and thirty guineas. Those animals below are getting quieter now."

She withdrew from the window, sitting down on a sofa. Maria took a seat near her. "We had been to see Mrs. Averil yesterday when we met you," observed Maria. "She is still a great sufferer."

"So Lord Averil told me," answered Charlotte. "He dined at the Folly yesterday."

"Did he? George did not mention that Lord Averil was of the party. Did you dine with them?"

"Not I," answered Charlotte. "It was bore enough to have them in the drawing-room afterwards. Only a few of them came in. As to your husband, I never set eyes upon him at all."

"He came home early. I think his head ached. He——"

"Oh, he did come home, then!" interrupted Charlotte.

Maria looked surprised. "Of course he came home. Why should he not?"

"How should I know why?" was Charlotte's answer. "This house has the bother of it to-night, I hear. It is nothing but a bother, a gentleman's dinner-party!"

"It is a sort of business-party to-night, I believe," observed Maria.

"Verrall is coming. He told me

so. Do you know how Mr. Godolphin is?"

"He seems as well as usual. He is come to-day, and I saw him for a minute. George told me that he did not appear at dinner yesterday. Margery——"

A commotion in the street. Charlotte flew to one of the windows, opened it, and stretched herself out. But she could not see the carriage, which was then in Crosse Street. A mob was collecting and shouting.

"I suppose I had better go. That stupid man never can keep horses in good humor, if they have any spirit. Good-by, Mrs. George Godolphin."

She ran down the stairs and out at the hall-door, giving no time to a servant to show her out. Maria proceeded to her little sitting-room, which looked into Crosse Street, to see whether any thing was the matter.

Something might have been, but that George Godolphin hearing the outcry, had flown out to the aid of servant. The man, in his fear—he was a timid man with horses, and it was a wonder Charlotte kept him—had got out of the carriage. George leaped into it, took the reins and the whip, and succeeded in restoring the horses to what Charlotte called good humor. Maria's heart beat when she saw her husband there: she, like the man, was timid. George, however, alighted unharmed, and stood talking with Charlotte. He was without his hat. Then he handed Charlotte in, and stood looking up and talking to her again, the seat being about a mile above his head. Charlotte, at any rate, had no fear; she nodded a final adieu to George, and drove away at a fast pace, George gazing after her.

Intimate as George Godolphin was with Charlotte Pain, no such thought as that of attributing it to a wrong motive, ever occurred to Maria. She had been jealous of Charlotte Pain in the old days, when she was Maria Hastings, dreading that George might choose her for his wife: but with their marriage all such feeling ceased. Maria was an English gentlewoman,

in the best sense of the term; of a refined, retiring nature, of simply modest speech, innocent of heart: to associate harm now with her husband and Charlotte, was a thing next to impossible for her to glance at. Unbiased by others, she would never be likely to glance at it. She did not like Charlotte: where tastes and qualities are so much opposed as they were in her and Charlotte Pain, mutual predilection is not easy: but, to suspect any greater cause for dislike, was foreign to Maria's nature. Had Maria even received a hint that the fine saddle-horse, boasted of by Charlotte as worthy Maria's special observation, and costing a hundred and thirty guineas, was a present from her husband, she would have attached no motive to the gift, but kindness; given him no worse word than a hint at extravagance. Maria could almost as soon have disbelieved in herself as disbelieved in the cardinal virtues of George Godolphin.

It was the day of one of George's dinner-parties,—as Charlotte has announced for our information. Fourteen were expected to sit down, inclusive of himself and his brother,—mostly countrymen; men who did business with the bank; Mr. Verrall and Lord Averil being two of them: but Mr. Verrall did not do business with the bank, and was not looked upon as a countryman. It was not Maria's custom to appear at all at these parties: she did not, like Charlotte Pain, play the hostess afterwards in the drawing-room. Sometimes Maria would spend these evenings out: at Ashlydyat, or at the rectory: sometimes, as was her intention on this evening, she would remain in the pretty sitting-room in her own apartments, leaving the house free. She had been busy over her drawing all day, and had not quitted it to stir abroad.

Mr. George had stirred abroad. Mr. George had taken a late afternoon ride with Charlotte Pain. He came home barely in time to dress. The bank was closed for the day: the clerks had all gone, save one,—the old

cashier, Mr. Hurde. He sometimes stayed later than the rest.

"Any private letters for me?" inquired George, hastening into the office, whip in hand, and devouring the letter-rack with eager eyes, where the unopened letters were usually put.

The cashier, a tall man once, but stooping now, with silver spectacles and white whiskers, stretched up his neck to look also. "There's one there, sir," he cried, before George had quite crossed the office.

George made a grab at the letter. It stuck in the rack, and he gave vent to an impatient word. A blank look of disappointment came over his face, when he saw the direction.

"This is not for me. This is for Mr. Hastings. Who sorted the letters?"

"Mr. Hastings, I believe, sir, as usual."

"What made him put his own letter in the rack?" muttered George to himself. He went about the office; he went into the private room and searched his own table. No: there was no letter for him. Mr. Hurde remembered that Mr. George Godolphin had been put out in the morning by not receiving an expected letter.

George looked at his watch. "There's no time to go to Verrall's," he thought. "And he would be starting to come here by the time I got up to the Folly."

Up to his own room to dress, which was not a long process. He then entered his wife's sitting-room.

"Drawing still, Maria?"

She looked up with a bright glance. "I have been so industrious! I have been drawing nearly all day. See! I have nearly finished this."

George stood by the table in a listless manner, his thoughts preoccupied,—not pleasantly preoccupied, either. Presently he began turning over the old sketches in Maria's portfolio. Maria quitted her seat, and stood by her husband, her arm round his neck. He was now sitting sideways on a chair.

"I put some of these drawings into the portfolio this morning," she observed. "I found them in a box in the lumber-room. They had not been disinterred. I do believe, since they

came here from the rectory. Do you remember that one, George?"

He took the sketch she pointed to, in his hand. A few moments and then the recollection flashed over him. "It is a scene near Broomhead! That is Bray's cottage."

"How glad I am that you recognize it!" she cried, gleefully. "It is a proof that I sketched it faithfully. Do you remember the day that I did it, George?"

George could not remember that. "Not particularly," he answered.

"Oh, George! It was the day I was frightened by seeing that snake,—or whatever it was. You, and I, and Charlotte Pain, were there. We took refuge in Bray's house."

"Refuge from the snake?" asked George.

Maria laughed. "Lady Godolphin came up, and said I ought to go there and rest, and take some water. How terribly frightened I was! I can recall it still. Bray wanted to marry us afterwards," she continued, laughing more heartily.

"Bray would have married me to both of you, you and Charlotte, for a crown apiece," said George.

"Were you in earnest,—when you asked me to let him do it?" she dreamily inquired, after a pause, her thoughts cast back to the past.

"I dare say I was, Maria. We do foolish things sometimes. Had you said yes, I should have thought you a silly girl afterwards for your pains."

"Of course you would. Do you see that old Welshwoman in the doorway?" resumed Maria, pointing to the drawing. "She was a nice old body, in spite of her pipe. I wonder whether she is alive? Perhaps Margery knows. Margery had a letter from her sister this morning."

"Had she?" carelessly returned George. "I saw there was a letter for her with the Scotch postmark. Has Bray come to grief yet?"

"I fancy they are always in grief, by the frequency of the appeals to Margery. Lady Godolphin is kind to

the wife. She tells Margery, if it were not for my lady, she would starve."

An arrival was heard as Maria spoke, and George rang the bell. It was answered by Maria's maid, but George said he wanted the butler. The man appeared.

"Is Mr. Verrall come?"

"No, sir. It is Mr. Godolphin."

"When Mr. Verrall comes, show him into the bank-parlor, and call me. I wish to see him before he goes into the drawing-room."

The man departed with his order. George went into the bedroom which was adjoining. A few minutes, and some one else was heard to come in, and run up the stairs with eager steps. It was followed by an impatient knocking at Maria's door.

"It proved to be Isaac Hastings,—a fine-looking young man, with a sensible countenance. "Have they gone in to dinner yet, Maria?" he hastily cried.

"No. It is not time. Nobody's come but Mr. Godolphin."

"I did such a stupid trick. I——"

"Is it you, Isaac?" interrupted George, returning to the room. "I could not think who it was, rushing up."

"I wanted to catch you, sir, before you went in to dinner," replied Isaac, holding out a letter to George. "It came for you this afternoon," he continued, "and I put it, as I thought, in the rack; and one for myself, which also came, I put in my pocket. Just now I found that I had brought away yours, and left mine."

"Yours is in the rack now," said George. "I wondered what brought it there. Hurde said you sorted the letters."

He took the letter, glanced at its superscription, and retired to the window to read it. There appeared to be but a very few lines. George read it twice over, and then lifted his flushed face,—flushed as it seemed with pain, with a perplexed, hopeless sort of expression. Maria could see his face in the pier-glass. She turned to him:

"George, what is it? You have bad news!"

He crushed the letter in his hand: "Bad news! Nothing of the sort. Why should you think that? It is a business-letter that I ought to have had yesterday, though, and I am vexed at the delay."

He left the room again. Isaac prepared to depart.

"Will you stay and take tea with me, Isaac?" asked Maria. "I have dined. I am expecting Rose."

"I am out at tea already," answered Isaac, with a laugh. "I was at Grace's. We were beginning tea, when I put my hand in my pocket to take out the letter, and found it was Mr. George Godolphin's."

"You were not in a hurry to read your own letter," returned Maria.

"No. I knew whom it was from. There was no hurry. I ran all the way from Grace's here, and now I must run back again. Good-by, Maria."

Isaac went. George was in and out of the room, walking about in a restless manner. Several arrivals had been heard, and Maria felt sure that all the guests, or nearly all, must have come. "Why don't you go to them, George?" she asked.

The hour for dinner struck as she spoke, and George quitted the room. He did not enter the drawing-room, but went down and spoke to the butler.

"Is Mr. Verrall not come yet?"

"No, sir. Every one else is here."

George retraced his steps up-stairs and entered the drawing-room. He was gay George again; handsome George; not a line of perplexity could be traced on his open brow, not a shade of care in his bright blue eye. He shook hands with his guests, offering only a half apology for his tardiness, and saying that he knew his brother was there to replace him.

Some minutes of busy conversation, and then it flagged: another few minutes of it, and a second flag. Thomas Godolphin whispered his brother,

"George, I should not wait. Mr. Verrall cannot be coming."

George went quite red, apparently with anger. "Not be coming? Of course he is coming! There's nothing likely to detain him."

Thomas said no more. But the waiting—well, you all know what it is, this awkward waiting for dinner. By-and-by the butler looked into the room. George thought it might be a hint that the dinner was spoiling, and he reluctantly gave orders for serving.

A knock at the door—a loud knock—resounding through the house. George Godolphin's face lighted up. "There he is!" he exclaimed. "But it was too bad of him to keep us waiting."

There he is *not*, George might have said, could he have looked through the closed door at the applicant standing there. It was only an evening visitor for Maria,—pretty Rose Hastings.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A REVELATION IN THE ASH-TREE WALK.

THE dinner-table was spacious; consequently, the absence of one at it was conspicuous. Mr. Verrall's chair was still left: he would come yet, George said. There was no clergyman present, and Thomas Godolphin said the grace. He sat at the foot of the table, opposite to his brother.

"We are thirteen!" exclaimed Sir John Pevans, a young baronet, who had been reared to be a milksop, and feared consumption for himself. "I don't much like it. It is the ominous number, you know."

Some of them laughed. "What is that peculiar superstition?" asked Colonel Max. "I have never been able to understand it."

"The superstition is, that if a party of thirteen sit down to dinner, one of them is sure to die before the year is

out," replied young Pevans, speaking with grave seriousness.

"Why is thirteen not as good a number to sit down as any other?" cried Colonel Max, humoring the baronet. "As good as fourteen, for instance?"

"It's the odd number."

"The odd number. It's no more the odd number, Pevans, than any other number's odd, that's not even. What do you say to eleven?—what do you say to fifteen?"

"I can't explain it," returned Sir John. "I only know that the superstition does exist, and that I have noticed, in more instances than one, that it has been borne out. Three or four parties who have sat down to dinner thirteen, have lost one of them before the year has come round. You laugh at me, of course; I have been laughed at before; but, suppose you notice it now. We are thirteen of us: see if we are all alive by the end of the year.

Thomas Godolphin, in his inmost heart, thought it not unlikely that one of them, at any rate, would not be there. Several faces were broad with amusement: the most serious of them was Lord Averil's.

"You don't believe in it, Averil!" uttered Colonel Max, in surprise, as he gazed at him.

"It" was the answer. "Certainly not. Why should you ask it?"

"You look so grave over it."

"I never like to joke, though it be but by a smile, on the subject of death," replied Lord Averil. "I once received a lesson upon the point, and it will serve me for my life."

"Will your lordship tell us what it was?" interposed Sir John, who had been introduced to Lord Averil that day for the first time.

"I cannot tell it now," replied Lord Averil. "It is not a subject suited to a merry party," he frankly added. "But it would not tend to bear out your superstition, Sir John: you are possibly thinking that it might."

"If I have sat down once thirteen, I have sat down fifty times," cried Colonel Max, "and we all lived the

year out, and many a year on to it. I'd not mention such nonsense again, were I you, Sir John."

Sir John did not answer for a moment: he was enjoying his first glass of sparkling wine. "Only notice, that's all," nodded he. "I don't want to be a croaker, but I don't like to sit down thirteen."

"Could we not make Verrall the scapegoat, and invoke the evil to fall on his head?" cried a mocking voice. "It is his fault."

"Sir John," interrupted another, "how do you calculate the time? Is the damage to accrue before this veritable year of grace is out; or do you give us full twelve months from this evening?"

"Ridicule me as much as you like," said Sir John, good humoredly. "All I say is, Notice. If every one of us, now sitting here, is alive this time twelvemonth, then I'll not put faith in it again. I hope we shall be!"

"I hope we shall be, too," acquiesced Colonel Max. "You are a social subject, though, to invite to dinner, Pevans! I should fancy Mr. George Godolphin is thinking so."

Mr. George Godolphin appeared to be thinking of something that rendered him somewhat distrait. In point of fact, his duties as host were considerably broken in upon by listening to the door. Above the conversation, the clatter of plates, the drawing of corks, his ear was alive, hoping for the knock which should announce Mr. Verrall. It was of course strange that he neither came nor sent. But no knock seemed to come: and George could only rally his powers and forget Mr. Verrall.

It was a *recherché* repast. George Godolphin's state dinners always were. No trouble or expense was spared at them. Luxuries, in season and out of season, would be there. The turtle would seem richer at his table than at any other, the venison more than venison; the Moselle was of a fuller flavor, the sparkling hermitage was of the rarest vintage. The dinner this day did not disgrace its predecessors,

and the guests appeared to enjoy themselves to the utmost, in spite of the absence of Mr. Verrall, and Sir John Pevans's prognostications thereon.

The evening was drawing on, and some of the gentlemen were solacing themselves with a cup of coffee, when the butler slipped a note into his master's hand. "The man is waiting for an answer, sir," he whispered.

George glided out of the room, opened the note, and read it. So fully impressed had he been with the conviction that it came from Mr. Verrall, explaining the cause of his absence, that he positively had to read it twice over before he could take in the fact fully that it was not from Mr. Verrall at all. A very few lines in pencil, dated from the principal inn of the place, and running as follows :

"DEAR GODOLPHIN :—I am ill and creaky, and have halted here midway in my journey, to get a night's rest, before going on again, which I must do at six in the morning. Come in for half an hour, there's a good fellow ! I don't know when we may meet again. The regiment embarks to-morrow ; and it can't embark without me. Come at once or I shall be gone to-bed.

"G. ST. AUBYN."

One burning desire, almost irrepresible, had hung over George all the evening—that he could run up to Verrall's and learn the cause of his absence. Mr. Verrall's absence in itself would not in the least have troubled George ; but he had a most urgent reason for wishing to see him : hence his anxiety. To leave his guests to themselves, and do so, would have been scarcely the thing ; but this note appeared to afford just the excuse wanting. At any rate, George determined to make it the excuse.

"One of the waiters brought this, I suppose, Pierce?" he said to the butler.

"Yes, sir."

"My compliments, and I will be with Captain St. Aubyn directly."

George went into the room again. Intending to proclaim his proposed absence, and plead Captain St. Aubyn's illness (which he would put in a strong light) as his justification for the inroad upon good manners. A sudden thought came over him that he would only tell Thomas. George drew him aside.

"Thomas you'll be host for me for half an hour," he whispered. "St. Aubyn has just sent me an urgent summons to go and see him at the Bell. He was passing through Prior's Ash, and is forced to halt and lie up : very ill."

"Won't to-morrow morning do?" asked Thomas.

"He goes on at six. The regiment embarks to-morrow. I'll be back before they have had time to miss me. If they do miss me, say it is a duty of friendship that any one of them would have answered, as I am doing, if called upon. I'll soon be back."

Away he went. Thomas felt unusually well that evening, and exerted himself for his brother. Once out of the house, George hesitated. Should he dash up to Lady Godolphin's Folly first, and ease his mind, or should he go first to the Bell? The Bell was very near, but in the opposite direction to Ashlydyat. He turned first to the Bell, and was soon in the presence of Captain St. Aubyn.

They had been long friends, the two : first at school ; then at college ; and since, up to now. St. Aubyn was of the same county, but from its extreme confines. George had seen him some days before, and had then wished him God speed. He was bound for Malta.

"I am sorry to have sent for you," exclaimed Captain St. Aubyn, holding out his hand to George. "I hear you have friends this evening."

"It is just the kindest thing you could have done for me," impulsively answered George. "I would have given a five-pound note out of my

pocket for a plea to be absent myself; and your letter came and afforded it."

What more he choose to explain was between themselves: it was not much: and in five minutes George was on his way to Lady Godolphin's Folly. On he strode, his eager legs scarcely touching the ground. He lifted his hat and bared his brow, hot with anxiety, to the night air. It was a very light night, the moon high; and, as George pushed through the dark grove on the grounds of the Folly, he saw Charlotte Pain emerge from the same at a little distance, a dark shawl, or mantle, thrown completely over her head, and figure, apparently for the purpose of disguise or concealment. Her face was turned for a moment towards the moonlight, and there was no mistaking the features of Charlotte Pain. Then she crouched down, and sped along under the friendly cover of the trees. George hastened to overtake her.

But when he got up with her, as he thought, there was no Charlotte there. There was no anybody. Where had she crept to? How had she disappeared? She must have plunged among the trees again. But George was in too much haste then to see Mr. Verrall, to puzzle himself over Charlotte. He crossed to the terrace and rang at the bell.

Were the servants making merry? He had to ring again. A tolerable peal this time. Its echoes might have been heard at Ashlydyat.

"Is Mr. Verrall at home?"

"No, sir. Mrs. Pain is."

"Mrs. Pain is not," thought George to himself. But he followed the man to the drawing-room.

To his indescribable astonishment, there sat Charlotte, at work. She was in evening dress, her gown and hair interlaced with jewels. Calmly and quietly sat she, very quietly for her, her King Charley reposing upon a chair at her side, fast asleep. It was next to impossible to fancy, or believe, that she could have been outside a minute or two ago, scudding in and out of the trees, as if dodging

somebody, perhaps himself. And yet, had it been necessary, George thought he could have sworn that the face he saw was the face of Charlotte. So bewildered did he feel, as to be diverted for a moment from the business which had taken him there.

"You may well be surprised!" cried Charlotte, looking at him; and George noticed, as she spoke, that she was unusually pale, not a vestige of color in her cheeks or lips. "To see me at work is one of the world's wonders. A crochet mat took my fancy to-day in a shop, and I bought it, thinking I'd make one like it. Instead of that, I have managed to ravel out the other."

She pointed on the ground as she spoke. There, half covered by her dress, lay a heap of crinkled-looking cotton; no doubt the ravelled-out mat. Charlotte was plying the needle again with assiduity, her eyes fixed on the pattern of instruction at her elbow.

"How very quickly you must have come in!" exclaimed George.

"Come in from where," asked Charlotte.

"As I came to the door, I saw you stooping down near the grove on the left, something dark over your head."

"You fancied it," said Charlotte. "I have not been out."

"But I certainly did see you," repeated George. "I could not be mistaken. You—were I fanciful, Charlotte, I should say you were in mischief, and wanted to escape observation. You were stooping down under shade of the trees and running along quickly."

Charlotte lifted her face and looked at him with wondering eyes. "Are you joking, or are you in earnest?" asked she.

"I never was more in earnest in my life. I could have staked my life upon its being you."

"Then I assure you I have not stirred out of this room since I came into it after dinner. What possessed me to try at this senseless work I cannot tell," she added, flinging it to the other end of the room in a momentary

accession of temper. "It has given me the headache, and they brought some tea to me."

"You are looking very pale," remarked George.

"Am I? I don't often get such a headache as this. The pain is here, ever my left temple. Bathe it for me, will you, George?"

A handkerchief and some eau-de-Cologne were lying on the table by her. George gallantly undertook the office: but he could not overget his wonder. "I'll tell you what, Charlotte. If it was not yourself, it must have been your——"

"It must have been my old blind black dog," interrupted Charlotte. "He has a habit of creeping about the trees at night. There! I am sure that's near enough. I don't believe it was any thing."

"Your double I was going to say," persisted George. "I never saw your face if I did not think I saw it then. It proves how mistaken we may be. Where's Verrall? A pretty trick he played me this evening."

"What trick?" repeated Charlotte. "Verrall's gone to London."

"Gone to London?" shouted George, his tone one of painful dismay. "It cannot be."

"It is," said Charlotte. "When I got in from our ride I found Verrall going off by the train. He had received a telegraphic message, which took him up."

"Why did he not call upon me? He knew—he knew—the necessity there was for me to see him. He ought to have come."

"I conclude he was in a hurry to catch the train," said Charlotte.

"Why did he not send?"

"He did send. I heard him send a verbal message by one of the servants, to the effect that he was summoned unexpectedly to London, and could not, therefore, attend your dinner. How early you have broken up!"

"We have not broken up. I left my guests to see after Verrall. No message was brought to me."

"Then I will inquire," began Charlotte, rising. George gently pushed her back.

"It is of little consequence," he said. "It might have saved me some suspense; but I am glad I got the dinner over without knowing it. I must see Verrall."

Charlotte carried her point, and rang the bell. "If you are glad, George, it is no extenuation for the negligence of the servants. They may be forgetting some message of more importance if they are left unproved now."

But, forgotten, the message had not been. The servant, it appeared, had misunderstood his master, and carried the message to Ashlydyat, instead of to the bank.

"How very stupid he must have been!" uttered Charlotte to George, when the explanation had been arrived at. "Sometimes I think servants have but half their share of brains."

"Charlotte, I must see Verrall. I had a letter this evening from London which I ought to have had yesterday, and it has driven me to my wits' end."

"About the old business?" questioned Charlotte.

"Just so. Look here."

He took the letter from his pocket, the letter brought back to him by Isaac Hastings, and which he had assured Maria had not contained bad news, opened it, and handed it to Charlotte for her perusal. Better, possibly, for Mr. George Godolphin that he had made a bosom friend of his wife than of Charlotte Pain! Better for gentlemen in general, it may be, that they should tell their secrets to their wives than to their wives' rivals, however comprehensive the fascinations of these latter ladies may be; George, however, made his own bed, as we all do; and George would have to lie upon it.

"What am I to do, Charlotte?"

Charlotte sat bending over the note, and pressing her forehead. Her look was one of perplexity, — perplexity great as George's.

"It is a dangerous position," she said at length. "If not averted——"

She came to a dead pause, and their eyes met.

"Ay!" he repeated,—"if not averted! Nothing would remain for me but——"

"Hush, George," said she, laying her hand upon his lips, and then letting it fall upon his hand, where it remained.

There they sat, it is hard to say how long, heads together, talking earnestly. Charlotte was in his full confidence. Whatever may have been the nature, the depth of his perplexities, she fathomed them. At length George sprung up with a start.

"I am forgetting every thing! I forgot those people were at home, waiting for me. Charlotte, I must go."

She rose, put her arm within his, and took a step with him, as if she would go to let him out. Perhaps she was in the habit of letting him out.

"Not there! not that way!" she abruptly said, for George was turning to unclosethe shutter of the window. "Come into the next room, and I'll open that."

The next room was dark. They opened the window, and stood yet a minute within the room, talking anxiously still. Then he quitted her, and went forth.

He intended to take the lonely road homewards, that dark, narrow road you may remember to have heard of, where the ash-trees met overhead, and, as report went, a ghost was in the habit of taking walking exercise by night. George had no thoughts for ghosts just then: he had a "ghost" within him, frightful enough to scare away a whole lane full. Nevertheless, George Godolphin did take a step back with a start, when, just inside the Ash-tree walk, after passing the turnstile, there came a dismal groan from some dark figure seated on a broken bench.

It was all dark together there. The thick ash-trees hid the moon; George

had just emerged from where her beams shone bright and open; and not at first did he distinguish who it was, sitting there. But his eyes grew accustomed to the obscurity.

"Thomas!" he uttered in consternation. "Is it you?"

For answer, Thomas Godolphin caught hold of his brother, bent forward, and laid his forehead upon George's arm, another deep groan breaking from him.

That George Godolphin would rather have been waylaid by a real ghost, than by his brother at that particular time and place, was certain. It may be very charming to a school-boy to steal cherry-pudding, but it's not pleasant to be caught coming out of the pantry by the master. Better that the whole world should detect any undue anxiety for Mr. Verrall's companionship just then, than that Thomas Godolphin should. At least, George thought so: but conscience makes the best of us cowards. Nevertheless, he gave his earnest sympathy to his brother.

"Lean on me, Thomas. Let me support you. How have you been taken ill?"

Another minute, and the paroxysm of pain was past. Thomas wiped the dew from his brow, and George sat down on the narrow bench beside him.

"How came you to be here alone, Thomas? Where is your carriage?"

"I ordered the carriage early, and it came just as you had gone out," explained Thomas. "Feeling well, I sent it away, saying I would walk home. The pain overtook me just as I reached this spot, and but for the bench I should have fallen. But, George, what brings you here?" was the next very natural question. "You told me you were going to the Bell."

"So I was; so I did," said George, speaking volubly. "St. Aubyn I found very poorly: I told him he would be best in bed, and came away. It was a nice night; I felt inclined for a run; so I came up here to ask Verrall what had kept him away."

He was sent for to London, it seems, and the stupid servant took his apology to Ashlydyat, instead of to the bank."

Thomas Godolphin might well have rejoined, "If Verrall is away, where have you stopped?" but he made no remark.

"Are they all gone?" asked George, alluding to his guests.

"They are all gone. I made it right with them respecting your absence. My being there was almost the same thing: they appeared to regard it so. George, I believe I must have your arm as far as the house. See what an old man I am getting."

"Will you not rest longer? I am in no hurry, as they have gone. What can this pain be, that seems to be attacking you of late?"

"Has it never occurred to you what it may be?" quietly rejoined Thomas.

"No," replied George. But he noticed that Thomas's tone was a peculiar one, and he began to run over in his own mind all the pharmacopœia of ailments that flesh is heir to. "It cannot be rheumatism, can it, Thomas?"

"It is something worse than rheumatism," said Thomas, in his serene, ever-thoughtful tone. "A short while, George, and you will be master of Ashlydyat."

George's heart seemed to stand still, and then bound onwards in a tumult. The words struck upon every chord of feeling he possessed,—struck from more causes than one.

"What do you mean, Thomas? What do you fear may be the matter with you?"

"Do you remember what killed our mother?"

There was a painful pause. "Oh, Thomas!"

"It is so," said Thomas, quietly.

"I hope you are mistaken! I hope you are mistaken!" reiterated George. "Have you had advice? You must have advice."

"I have had it. Snow confirms my own suspicions. I desired the truth."

"Who's Snow?" returned George,

disparagingly. "Go to London, Thomas: consult the best men there. Or telegraph for one of them down to you."

"For the satisfaction of you all, I may do so," he replied. "But it cannot benefit me, George."

"Good Heavens, what a dreadful thing!" uttered George, with feeling. "What a blow to fall upon you!"

"You would regard it so, were it to fall upon you; and naturally. You are young, joyous; you have your wife and children. I have none of these attributes: and—if I had them all, we are in the hands of One who knows what is best."

George Godolphin did not feel very joyous just then: had not felt particularly joyous for a long time. Somehow, his own inward care was more palpable to him than this news, sad though it was, imparted by his brother. He lifted his right hand to his temples and kept it there. Thomas suffered his own hand to fall upon George's left, which rested on his knee,—a more holy contact than that imparted by Mrs. Charlotte Pain's.

"Don't grieve, George. I am more than resigned. I think of it as a happy change. This world, take it at the best, is full of care: if we seem free from it one year, it only falls upon us more unsparingly the next. It is wisely ordered: were the world made too pleasant to us, we might be wishing that it could be our permanent home."

Heaven knew that George had enough care upon him. *He* knew it. But he was not yet weary of the world. Few do weary of it, whatever may be their care, until they have learned to look for a better.

"In the days gone by, I have felt tempted to wonder why Ethel should have been taken," resumed Thomas Godolphin. "I see now how merciful the fiat was. George, I have been more thoughtfully observant, perhaps, than many are; and I have learnt to see, to know, how marvellously all these fiats are fraught with mercy; full of dark sorrow as they may seem

to us. It would have been a bitter trial to me to leave her here unprotected; in deep sorrow; perhaps with young children. I scarcely think I could have been reconciled to go; and I know what her grief would have been. All's for the best."

Most rare was it for undemonstrative Thomas Godolphin thus to express his hidden sentiments. George never knew him to do so before. The time and place were peculiarly fitted for it: the still, light night, telling of peacefulness; the shady trees around, the blue sky overhead. In these paroxysms of the disease, Thomas felt brought almost face to face with death.

"It will be a blow to Janet!" exclaimed George, the thought striking him.

"She will feel it as one."

"Thomas! can *nothing* be done for you?" was the impulsive rejoinder, spoken in all hearty good feeling.

"Could it be done for my mother, George?"

"I know. But, since then, science has made strides. Diseases, once deemed incurable, yield now to skill and enlightenment. I wish you would go to London!"

"There are some few diseases which bring death with them, in spite of human skill,—which will bring it to the end of time," rejoined Thomas Godolphin. "This is one."

"Well, Thomas, you have given me my pill for to-night,—and for a great many more nights and days too. I wish I had not heard it! But that, you will say, is a wish savoring only of selfishness. It is a dreadful affliction for you!—Thomas, I must say it,—a dreadful affliction."

"The disease, or the ending, do you mean?" Thomas asked, with a smile.

"Both are. But I spoke more particularly of the disease. The disease in itself is a lingering death, and nothing better."

"A lingering death is the most favored death,—as I regard it: a sudden death the most unhappy one. See what time is given me to set my

house in order," he added, the sober, pleasant smile deepening. "I must not fail to do it well, must I?"

"And the pain, Thomas! That will be lingering, too."

"I must bear it."

He rose as he spoke, and put his arm within his brother's. George seemed to him then the same powerful protector that he, Thomas, must have seemed to Sir George in that midnight walk at Broomhead. He stood a minute or two, as if gathering his strength, and then walked forward, leaning heavily on George. It was the pain, the excessive agony that so unnerved him,—a little while, and he would seem in the possession of his strength again.

"Ay, George, it will soon be yours. I shall not long keep you out of Ashlydyat. I cannot quite tell how you will manage alone at the bank when I am gone," he continued, more in a business tone. "I think of it a great deal. Sometimes I fancy it might be better if you took a staid, sober partner,—one of middle age, a thorough man of business. Great confidence has been accorded me, you know, George. I suppose people like my steady habits."

"They like you for your honest integrity," returned George, the words seeming to break from him impulsively. "I shall manage very well, I dare say, when the time comes. I suppose I must settle down to steadiness,—to be more like you have been, I can," he continued, in a sort of soliloquy. "I can, and I will."

"And George, you will be a good master," went on Thomas. "Be a kind, considerate, good master to all who shall then be dependent on you. I have tried to be so: and, now that the end has come, it is, I assure you, a pleasant consciousness to possess,—to look back upon. I have a few, very few poor pensioners who may have been a little the better for me: those I shall take care of, and Janet will sometimes see them. But some of the servants lapse to you with Ashlydyat: I speak of them. Make them

comfortable. Most of them are already in years: take care of them when they shall be too old to work."

"Oh, I'll do that," said George. "I expect Ja——"

George's words died away. They had turned round the ash-trees, and were in front of the Dark Plain. White enough looked the plain that night; but dark was the Shadow on it. Yes, it was there!—the dark, the portentous, the terrific Shadow of Ashlydyat!

They stood still. Perhaps their hearts stood still. Who can know? A man would rather confess to an unholy deed than acknowledge his belief in a ghostly superstition.

"How dark it is to-night!" broke from George.

In truth, it had never been darker, never more intensely distinct. If, as the popular belief went, the evil to overtake the Godolphins was foreshadowed to be greater or less, according to the darker or lighter hue of the Shadow, why then never did the like ill fall on the Godolphins that was to fall now.

"It is black, not dark," replied Thomas, in answer to George's remark. "I never saw it black as it is now. Last night it was comparatively light."

George turned his gaze quickly upwards to the moon,—searching in the aspect of that luminary a solution of the black shade of to-night. "There's no difference!" he cried aloud. "The moon was as bright as this, last night, but no brighter. I don't think it could be brighter. You say the Shadow was there last night, Thomas?"

"Yes,—but not so dark."

"But, Thomas! you were ill last night; you could not see it."

"I came as far as the turnstile here with Lord Averil. He called at Ashlydyat after leaving Lady Godolphin's Folly. I was better then, and strolled out of the house with him."

"Did he see the Shadow?"

"I don't know. It was there; but not very distinct. He did not appear to observe it. We were passing

quickly, and talking about my illness."

"Did you impart to Lord Averil any hint of what your illness may be?" asked George, hastily.

"Not an indication of it. Janet, Snow, and you are my only confidants as yet. Bexley partially so. Were that Shadow to be seen by Prior's Ash, and the fact of my illness to transpire, people would be for saying that it was a forewarning of my end," he continued, with a grave smile, as he and George turned to pursue their road to Ashlydyat.

They reached the porch in silence. George shook hands with his brother. "Don't you attempt to come to business to-morrow," he said. "I will come up in the evening and see you."

"Won't you come in now, George?"

"Not so. Good-night, Thomas. I heartily wish you better."

George turned and retraced his steps,—past the ash-trees, past the Dark Plain. Intensely black the Shadow did certainly look,—blacker even than when he had passed it just before,—at least so it appeared to George's eyes. He halted a moment, quite struck with the sombre hue. "Thomas said it appeared but light last night," he half muttered: "and for *him* death cannot be much of an evil. Superstitious Janet, daft Margery, would both say that the evil affects me,—that I am to bring it!" he added, with a smile of mockery at the words. "Angry enough it certainly looks!"

It did look angry. But George vouchsafed it no further attention. He had too much on his mind to give heed to a shadow, even though it were the ominous Shadow of Ashlydyat. George, as he had said to Charlotte Pain, was pretty near at his wife's end. One of his minor perplexities was, how he should get to London. He had urgent necessity for proceeding thither in search of Mr. Verrall, and equally urgent was it that the expedition should be kept from the knowledge of Thomas Godolphin.

What convenient excuse could he invent for his absence?

Rapidly arranging his plans, he proceeded again to the Bell Inn, held a few minutes' confidential conversation with Captain St. Aubyn, waking that gentleman out of his first sleep to hold it,—not that he by any means enlightened *him* as to any trouble that might be running riot with his brain,—and then went straight home. Maria came forward to meet him.

"How is poor Captain St. Aubyn, George? Very ill?"

"Very. How did you know any thing about it, Maria?"

"Thomas told me you had been sent for. Thomas came to my sitting-room before he left, after the rest were gone. You have stayed a good while with him."

"Ay. What should you say if I were to go back and stop the night with him?" asked George, half-jokingly.

"Is he so ill as that?"

"And also to accompany him a stage or two on his journey to-morrow morning? He starts at six, and he is about as fit to travel as an invalid first out of bed after a month's illness."

"Do you really mean that you are going to do all that, George?" she inquired, in surprise.

George nodded. "I do not fancy Thomas will be here to-morrow, Maria. Ask to speak to Isaac. Tell him that I shall be home some time in the afternoon, but I have gone out of town a few miles with a sick friend. He can say so if I am particularly inquired for."

George went to his bedroom. Maria followed him. He was changing his dresscoat and waistcoat, and he took an overcoat upon his arm. Then he looked at his watch.

"What is the time?" asked Maria.

"Twenty minutes past eleven. Good-night, my darling."

She fondly held his face down to

hers while he kissed her, giving him—as George had once saucily told her she would do—kiss for kiss. There was no shame in it now; only love. "Oh, George, my dearest, mind you come back safe and well to me!" she murmured, the tears filling her eyes.

"Don't I always come back safe and well to you, you foolish child! Take care of yourself, Maria."

He went down-stairs, unlocked the large door which shut in the bank premises, and entered the manager's room,—his own. Unlocking his desk, he took from it one or two things that he required, and was relocking it when Maria came in.

"I found this on the floor of our room, George. I think you must have dropped it."

It was the letter which had caused George such tribulation. "Thank you," he said eagerly, wondering at his carelessness; for it would not have been altogether agreeable had that letter been found and read by indiscriminate people. In changing some things from one coat to the other, he must have dropped it.

"Must you really go, George?"

"And this minute, too. Once more, good-by, my dearest."

Their last farewell, their last kiss was taken, Maria's hand lingering in his. Could she have divined that Mr. George's tender adieux sometimes strayed elsewhere!—that his confidences were given, but not to her! George locked the door, and Maria took the key, to deposit in its place. He then went out at the hall-door, and closed it after him.

It was well Maria did not watch him away! Well for her astonishment. Instead of going to the Bell Inn, he turned short round to the left, and took the cross-cut which led to the railway,—gaining the station in time to catch the express train, which passed through Prior's Ash at midnight for London.

CHAPTER XXX.

MR. VERRALL'S CHAMBERS.

IN thoroughly handsome chambers towards the west end of London, fitted up with a costly elegance more in accordance (one would think) with a place consecrated to the refinements of life than to business, there sat one morning a dark gentleman, of most staid and respectable appearance. To look at his clean, smoothly-shaven face, his gray hair, his gold-rimmed spectacles, his staid appearance altogether, every item of which carried respectability with it, you might have trusted the man at the first glance. In point of fact, he was got up to be trusted. A fire was pleasant on those spring mornings, and a large and clear one burnt in the burnished grate. Miniature statues, and other articles possessing, one must suppose, some rare excellence, gave to the room an artistic look: and the venerable gentleman (venerable in staid respectability, you must understand, more than from age, for his years were barely fifty) sat enjoying its blaze, and culling choice morsels from the *Times*. The money article, the prices of stock, a large insolvency case, and other news, especially acceptable to men of business, being eagerly read by him.

An architect might go and take a model of these chambers, so artistically were they arranged. A client could pass into any one of the three rooms, and not come out by the same door; he might go up to them by the wide and handsome staircase, and descend by means of a ladder, and emerge in a back street. Not altogether a ladder, literally speaking; but by a staircase so narrow as to deserve the name. It did happen, once in a way, that a gentleman might prefer that means of exit, even if he did not of entrance. These chambers were—not to keep you longer in suspense—the offices of the great bill-discounting firm, Trueworthy and Co.

One peculiar feature in their internal economy was, that no client ever

got to see Mr. Trueworthy. He was too great a man to stoop to business in his own proper person: he was taking his pleasure in the East; or he was on a visit to some foreign court, the especial guest of its imperial head; or sojourning with his bosom friend the Duke of Dorsetshire at his shooting-box; or reposing at his own country-seat; or ill in bed with the gout: for one or other of these contingencies Mr. Trueworthy was invariably invisible. It happened now and then that there was a disturbance in these elegant chambers, caused by some ill-bred and ill-advised gentleman, who persisted in saying that he had been treated hardly,—in point of fact, ruined. One or two had, on these occasions broadly asserted their conviction that there was no Mr. Trueworthy: but of course their ravings, whether on the score of their own wrongs, or on the non-existence of that estimable gentleman, whose fashionable movements might have filled a weekly column of the *Court Circular*, were taken for what they were worth.

In the years gone by—but a very few years, though—the firm had owned another head,—at any rate, another name. A young and fair man, who had disdained the exclusiveness adopted by his successor, and deemed himself not too great a mortal to be seen of men. This unfortunate principal had managed his affairs very badly. In some way or other, he came to grief. Perhaps the blame lay in his youth. Somebody was so wicked as to prefer against him a charge of swindling; and ill-natured tongues said it would go hard with him,—fifteen years at least. What they meant by the last phrase, they best knew. Like many another charge, it never came to any thing. The very hour before he would have been captured, he made his escape, and never since had been seen or heard of. Some surmised that he was dead, some that he was in hiding abroad: only one thing was certain; that into this country he could not again enter.

All that, however, was past and gone. The gentleman, Mr. Brompton, sitting at his ease over his newspaper, his legs stretched out to the blaze, was the confidential manager and head of the office: half the applicants did not know but he was the principal: strangers, at first, invariably believed that he was. A lower satellite, a clerk, or whatever he might be, sat in an outer room and bowed in the clients, his bow showing far more deference to this gentleman than to the clients themselves. How could they suppose that he was any thing less than the principal?

On this morning, there went up the broad staircase a gentleman whose remarkable good looks drew the eyes of the passers-by towards him, as he got out of the cab which brought him. The clerk took a hasty step forward, to impede his progress, for the gentleman was crossing the office with a bold step: and all steps might not be admitted to that inner room. The gentleman, however, put up his hand, as if to say, Don't you know me? and went on. The clerk, who at the first moment had probably not had time to recognize him, threw open the inner door.

"Mr. George Godolphin, sir."

Mr. George Godolphin strode on. He was evidently not on familiar terms with the gentleman, who rose to receive him, for he did not shake hands. His tone and manner were courteous.

"Is Mr. Verrall here?"

"He is not here, Mr. Godolphin. I am not sure that he will be here to-day."

"I must see him," said George, firmly. "I have followed him to town to see him. You know that he came up yesterday?"

"Yes. I met him last night."

"I should suppose, as he was sent for unexpectedly—which I hear was the case—that he was sent for on business; and therefore that he would be here to-day," pursued George.

"I am not sure of it. He left it an open question."

George looked uncommonly per-

plexed. "I must see him, and I must be back at Prior's Ash during business hours to-day. I want to catch the eleven down-train if I can."

"Can I do for you as well as Mr. Verrall?" asked Mr. Brompton, after a pause.

"No, you can't. Verrall I must see. It is very strange you don't know whether he is to be here, or not."

"It happens to-day that I do not know. Mr. Verrall left it last night, I say, an open question.

"It is the loss of time that I am thinking of," returned George. "You see, if I go down now to his residence, he may have left it to come up; and we should just miss each other."

"Very true," assented Mr. Brompton.

George stood a moment in thought, and then turned on his heel, and departed. "Do you know whether Mr. Verrall will be up this morning?" he asked of the clerk, as he passed through the outer room.

The clerk shook his head. "I am unable to say, sir."

George went down to the cab, and entered it. "Where to, sir?" asked the driver, as he closed the door.

"The South-Western Railway."

As the echo of George's footsteps died away on the stairs, Mr. Brompton, first slipping the bolt of the door which led into the clerk's room, opened the door of another room,—a double door, thoroughly well padded, deadening all semblance of sound between the apartments. It was a larger and more luxurious room still. Two gentlemen were seated in it, by a similar bright fire: though, to look at the face of the one—a young man, whose handkerchief, as it lay carelessly on the table beside him, bore a viscount's coronet—nobody would have thought the fire was needed. His face was of a glowing red, and he was talking in angry excitement, but with a tone and manner somewhat subdued, as if he were in the presence of a master, and dared not put forth his mettle. In short, he looked something like a caged

Mon. Opposite to him, listening with cold, imperturbable courtesy, his face utterly impassive, as it ever was, his eyes calm, his yellow hair in perfect order, his moustaches smooth, his elbows resting on the arms of the chair, and the tips of his fingers meeting, on one of which fingers shone a monster diamond of the purest water, was Mr. Verrall. Early as the hour was, glasses and champagne stood on the table.

Mr. Brompton telegraphed a sign to Mr. Verrall, and he came out, leaving the viscount to waste his anger upon air. The viscount might rely on one thing: that it was just as good to bestow it upon air as upon Mr. Verrall, for all the impression it would make on the latter.

"Godolphin has been here," said Mr. Brompton, keeping the thick doors carefully closed.

"He has followed me to town, then! I thought he might. It is of no use my seeing him. If he won't go deeper into the mire, why, the explosion must come."

"He must go deeper into it," remarked Mr. Brompton.

"He holds out against it, and words seem wasted on him. Where's he gone?"

"Down to your house, I expect. He says he must be back home to-day, but must see you first. I thought you would not care to meet him, so said I didn't know whether you'd be here or not."

Mr. Verrall mused. "Yes, I'll see him. I can't deal with him altogether as I do with others. And he has been a lucky card to us."

Mr. Verrall went back to his viscount, who by that time was striding in the most explosive manner up and down the room. Mr. Brompton sat down to his newspaper again, and his interesting news of the Insolvent Court.

In one of the most charming villas on the banks of the Thames,—a villa which literally lacked nothing desirable that money could buy, sums of which had been lavished upon it,—sat

Mrs. Verrall at a late breakfast, on that same morning. She jumped up with a little scream at the sight of George Godolphin crossing the velvet lawn.

"What ill news have you come to tell me? Is Charlotte killed? or is Lady Godolphin's Folly on fire?"

"Charlotte was well when I left her, and the Folly standing," replied George, throwing care momentarily to the winds, as he was sure to do in the presence of a pretty woman.

"She *will* be killed, you know, some day, with those horses of hers," rejoined Mrs. Verrall. "What have you come for, then, at this unexpected hour?" When Verrall arrived last night, he said you were dinner-holding at Prior's Ash."

"I want to see Verrall. Is he up yet?"

"Up! He was up and away ages before I awoke. He went up early to the office."

George paused: "I have been to the office, and Mr. Brompton said he did not know whether he would be there to-day at all."

"Oh, well, I don't know," returned Mrs. Verrall, believing she might have made an inconvenient admission. "When he goes up to town, I assume he goes to the office; but he may be bound to the wilds of Siberia for any thing I can tell."

"When do you expect him home?" asked George.

"I did not ask him when," carelessly replied Mrs. Verrall. "It may be to-day, or it may be next month. What will you take for breakfast?"

"I will not take any thing," replied George, holding out his hand to depart.

"But you are not going again in this hasty manner! What sort of a visit do you call this?"

"A hasty one," replied George. "I must be at Prior's Ash this afternoon. Any message to Charlotte?"

"Why—yes—I have," said Mrs. Verrall, with some emphasis. "I was about to despatch a small parcel this very next hour to Charlotte, by post."

But—when shall you see her? To-night?"

"I can see her to-night if you wish."

"It would oblige me much. The truth is, it is something I ought to have sent yesterday, and I forgot it. Be sure let her have it to-night."

Mrs. Verrall rang, and a small packet, no larger than a thick letter, was brought in. George took it, and was soon being whirled back to London.

He stepped into a cab at the Waterloo station, telling the man he should have double pay if he'd drive at double speed, and it conveyed him to Mr. Verrall's chambers.

George went straight to Mr. Brompton's room, as before. That gentleman had finished his *Times*, and was buried deep in a pile of letters. "Is Verrall in now?" asked George.

"He is here now, Mr. Godolphin. He was here two minutes after you departed: it's a wonder you did not meet."

George knew the way to Mr. Verrall's room, and was allowed to enter. Mr. Verrall, alone then, turned round with a cordial grasp.

"Halloa!" said he. "We somehow missed this morning. How are you?"

"I say, Verrall, how came you to play me such a trick as to go off in that clandestine manner yesterday?" remonstrated George. "You know the uncertainty I was in,—that if I did not get what I hoped to get, I should be on my beam-ends."

"My dear fellow, I supposed you had got it. Hearing nothing of you all day, I concluded it had come by the morning's post."

"It had not come, then," returned George, in a crusty tone. In spite of his blind trust in the unbleached good faith of Mr. Verrall, there were moments when a thought would cross him whether that gentleman had been playing a double game. This was one.

"I had a hasty summons, and was obliged to come away without delay," explained Mr. Verrall. "I sent you a message."

"Which I never got," retorted George. "But the message is not the question. See here! A pretty letter this for a man to receive! It came by the afternoon post."

Mr. Verrall took the letter and digested the contents deliberately; in all probability he had known the substance before. "What do you think of it?" demanded George.

"It's unfortunate," said Mr. Verrall.

"It's ruin," returned George.

"Unless averted. But it must be averted."

"How?"

"There is one way, you know," said Mr. Verrall, after a pause. "I have pointed it out to you already."

"And I wish your tongue had been blistered, Verrall, before you ever had pointed it out to me!" foamed George. "There!"

Mr. Verrall raised his impassive eyebrows. "You must be aware—"

"Man!" interrupted George, his voice hoarse with emotion, as he grasped Mr. Verrall's shoulder, "do you know that the temptation, since you suggested it, is ever standing out before me, like an *ignis fatuus*, beckoning me on to it?—though I know that it would prove nothing but a curse to engulf me."

"Here, George, take this," said Mr. Verrall, pouring out a large tumbler of sparkling wine, and forcing it upon him. "The worst of you is, that you get so excited over things! and then you are sure to look at them in a wrong light. Just hear me for a moment. The pressure is all at this present moment, is it not? If you can lift it, you will recover yourself fast enough. Has it ever struck you," Mr. Verrall added, somewhat abruptly, "that your brother is fading?"

Remembering the scene with his brother on the previous night, George looked very conscious. He simply nodded an answer.

"With Ashlydyat yours, you would recover yourself almost immediately. There would positively be no risk."

"No risk!" repeated George, with emphasis.

"I cannot see that there would be. Every thing's a risk, if you come to that. We are in risk of earthquakes, of a national bankruptcy, of various other calamities: but the risk that would attend the step I suggested to you is really so slight as not to be called a risk. It never can be known: the chances are as a hundred thousand to one."

"But there remains the one," persisted George.

"To let an exposé come would be an act of madness, at the worst look-out; but it is madness and double madness when you may so soon succeed to Ashlydyat."

"Oblige me by not counting upon that, Verrall," said George. "I hope, ill as my brother appears to be, that he may live yet."

"I don't wish to count upon it," returned Mr. Verrall. "It is for you to count upon it, not me. Were I in your place, I should not shut my eyes to the palpable fact. Look here: your object is to get out of this mess?"

"You know it is," said George.

"Very well. I see but one way for you to do it. The money must be raised for it, and how is that to be done? Why, by the means I suggest. It will never be known. A little time, and things can be worked round again."

"I have been thinking to work things round this long while," said George. "And they grow worse instead of better."

"Therefore I say that you should not shut your eyes to the prospect of Ashlydyat. Sit down. Be yourself again, and let us talk things over quietly."

"You see, Verrall, the risk falls wholly upon me."

"And, upon whom the benefit, for which the risk will be incurred?" pointedly returned Mr. Verrall.

"It seems to me that I don't get the lion's share in these benefits," was George's remark.

"Sit down, I say. Can't you be still? Here, take some more wine. There, now let us talk it over."

And talk it over they did, as may be inferred. For it was a full hour afterwards when George came out. He leaped into the cab, which had waited, telling the man that he must drive as if he were going through fire and water. The man did so: and George arrived at the Paddington Station just in time to lose the train.

Ah! when we see these gentlemen flying along in their Hansom cabs, so apparently at their ease, if we could but see also the miserable perplexity that is racking some of their hearts!

CHAPTER XXXI.

DONE! BEYOND RECALL.

THE clerks were at a stand-still in the banking-house of Godolphin, Crosse, and Godolphin. A certain iron safe was required to be opened, and the key was not producible. There were duplicate keys to it; one of them was kept by Mr. Godolphin, the other by Mr. George. Mr. Hurde, the cashier, appealed to Isaac Hastings.

"Do you think it has been left with Mrs. George Godolphin?"

"I'll ask her," replied Isaac, getting off his stool. "I don't think it has: or she would have given it to me when she informed me of Mr. George Godolphin's absence."

He went into the dining-room,—that pleasant room, which it was almost a shame to designate by the name. Maria was standing against the window-frame in a listless manner, plucking mechanically the fading blossoms of a geranium. She turned her head at the opening of the door, and saw her brother.

"Isaac, what time does the first train come in?"

"From what place?" inquired Isaac.

"Oh—from the Portsmouth direction. It was Portsmouth that Cap-

tain St. Aubyn was to embark from, was it not?"

"I don't know any thing about it," replied Isaac. "Neither can I tell at what hours trains arrive from that direction. Maria, has Mr. George Godolphin left the book-safe key with you?"

"No," was Maria's answer. "I suppose he must have forgotten to do so. He has left it with me when he has gone on an unexpected journey before, after banking-hours."

Isaac returned to the rest of the clerks. The key was wanted badly, and it was decided that he should go up to Ashlydyat for Mr. Godolphin's.

He took the nearest road,—down Crosse Street, and through the Ash-tree walk. It was a place, as you have heard, especially shunned by night: it was not much frequented by day. Therefore it was no surprise to Isaac Hastings that he did not, all through it, meet a single thing, neither man nor ghost. Right at the very top, however, on that same broken bench where Thomas Godolphin and his bodily agony had come to an anchor the previous night, there sat Charlotte Pain.

She was in deep thought; deep perplexity; there was no mistaking that her countenance displayed both: some might have fancied in deep pain, either bodily or mental. Pale she was not. Charlotte's complexion was made up too fashionably for either red or white, born of emotion, to overspread it, unless it might be emotion of an extraordinary nature. Hands clenched, brows knit, lips drawn from her teeth, eyes staring on vacancy,—Isaac Hastings could not avoid reading the signs. And he read them with surprise.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Pain?"

Charlotte started from her seat with a half scream. "What's the use of your startling one like that?" she fiercely exclaimed.

"I did not startle you intentionally," replied Isaac. "You might have heard my footsteps, had you not been so preoccupied. Did you think it was the ghost arriving?" he added, jestingly.

"Of course I did," returned Charlotte, laughing, as she made an effort and a successful one, to recover herself. "What do you do here this morning? Did you come to look after the ghost, or after me?"

"After neither," replied Isaac, with more truth than gallantry. "Mr. George Godolphin has sent me up here."

Now, in saying this, what Isaac meant to express was nothing more than that his coming up was *caused* by George Godolphin,—alluding, of course, to George's forgetfulness in carrying off the key. Charlotte, however took the words literally, and her eyes opened.

"Did George Godolphin not go last night?"

"Yes, he went. He forgot——"

"Then what can have brought him back so soon?" was her vehement interruption, not allowing Isaac time to conclude. "There's no train in from London yet."

"Is there not?" was Isaac's rejoinder, looking keenly at her.

"Why, of course there's not,—as you know, or ought to know. Besides, he could not get the business done that he has gone upon, and be back yet, unless he came by telegraph. He intended to leave by the eleven-o'clock train from Paddington."

She spoke rapidly, thoughtlessly, in her surprise. Her inward thought was, that to have gone to London, and come back again since the hour at which she parted from him the previous night, one way, at any rate, must have been accomplished on the telegraph wires. Had she taken a moment for reflection, she might not have spoken. However familiar she was with the affairs of Mrs. George Godolphin, so much the more reason was there for her shunning open allusion to them.

"Who told you Mr. George Godolphin had gone to London, Mrs. Pain?" asked Isaac, after a pause.

"Do you think I did not know it? Better than you, Mr. Isaac, clever and wise as you deem yourself."

"I pretend to be neither one nor

the other, with regard to the movements of Mr. George Godolphin," was the reply of Isaac. "It is not my place to be. I heard he had only gone a stage or two towards Portsmouth with a sick friend. Of course, if you know he has gone to London, that is a different matter. I can't stay now, Mrs. Pain: I have a message for Mr. Godolphin."

"Then he is not back?" cried out Charlotte, when Isaac was going through the turnstile.

"Not yet."

Charlotte looked after him as he whisked out of sight, and bit her lips. A doubt was flashing over her—called up by the last observation of Isaac—whether she had done right to allude to London. When George had been with her, discussing it, he had wondered what excuse he should invent for taking the journey, and Charlotte never supposed but what it would be known. The bright idea of starting on a benevolent excursion towards Portsmouth, had been an afterthought of Mr. George's as he journeyed home.

"If I have done mischief," Charlotte was beginning slowly to murmur, —but she threw back her head defiantly. "Oh, nonsense to mischief! What does it matter? George can battle it out."

Thomas Godolphin was at breakfast in his own room, his face, pale and worn, bearing traces of suffering. Isaac Hastings was admitted to him, and explained the cause of his appearance. Thomas received the news of George's absence with considerable surprise.

"He left me late last night—in the night, I may say—to return home. He said nothing then of his intention to be absent. Where do you say he has gone?"

"Maria delivered a message to me, sir, from him, to the effect that he had accompanied a sick friend, Captain St. Aubyn, a few miles on the Portsmouth line," replied Isaac. "But Mrs. Pain, whom I have just met, says it is to London that he has gone,—she knows it."

Thomas Godolphin made no further comment. It may not have pleased him to remark upon any information furnished by Mrs. Charlotte Pain. He handed the key to Isaac, and said he should speedily follow him to the bank. It had not been Thomas Godolphin's intention to go to the bank that day, but the hearing of George's absence caused him to proceed thither. He ordered his carriage, and got there almost as soon as Isaac, bearing an invitation to Maria from Janet.

A quarter of an hour given to business in the manager's room, George's, and then Thomas Godolphin went to Maria. She was seated now near the window, in her pretty morning-dress, engaged in some sort of fancy work. In her gentle face, her soft sweet eyes, Thomas would sometimes fancy he read a resemblance to his lost Ethel. Thomas greatly loved and estimated Maria.

She rose to receive him, holding out her hand that he might take it, as she quietly but earnestly made inquiries into his state of health. Not so well as he was yesterday, Thomas answered. He supposed George had given her the account of their meeting the previous night, under the ash-trees, and of his, Thomas's, illness.

Maria had not heard it. "How could George have been at the ash-trees last night?" she wonderingly inquired. "Do you mean *last* night, Thomas?"

"Yes, last night, after I left you. I was taken ill in going home——"

Miss Meta, who had been fluttering about the terrace, fluttered in to see who it might be talking with her mamma, and interrupted the conclusion. "Uncle Thomas! Uncle Thomas!" cried she, joyously. They were great friends.

Her entrance diverted the channel of the conversation. Thomas took the child on his knee, fondly stroking her golden curls. Thomas remembered to have stroked just such golden curls on the head of his brother George, when he, George, was a little fellow of Meta's age.

"Janet bade me ask if you would go to Ashlydyat for the day, Maria," said he. "She——"

"Meta go too," put in the little quick tongue. "Meta go too, Uncle Thomas."

"Will Meta be good?—and not run away from Aunt Janet, and lose herself in the passages, as she did last time?" said Thomas, with a smile.

"Meta very good," was the answer, given with an oracular nod of promise.

"Then Meta shall go,—if mamma pleases."

Meta took it for granted that mamma would please. She waited for no further consent, but slid down from her seat and ran away to find Margery and tell her. Thomas turned to Maria.

"Where is it that George has gone?" he asked,—“with St. Aubyn? or to London?"

"Not to London," replied Maria. "He has gone with Captain St. Aubyn. What made you think of London?"

"Isaac said Mrs. Pain thought he had gone to London," replied Thomas. "It was some mistake, I suppose. But I wonder he should go out to-day for any thing less urgent than necessity. The bank wants him. Will you go to Ashlydyat, Maria?"

"Yes, I shall like to go. I always feel dull when George is away."

Maria was soon to be convinced that she need not have spoken so surely about George's having gone with Captain St. Aubyn. When she and Meta, with Margery, — who would have thought herself grievously wronged had she not been of the party to Ashlydyat,—were starting, Thomas came out of the bank-parlor and accompanied them to the door. While standing there, the porter at the Bell Inn happened to pass, and Maria stopped him to inquire whether Captain St. Aubyn was better when he left.

"He was not at all well, ma'am," was the man's answer,—“hardly fit to travel. He had been in a sort of fever in the night"

"And my master, I suppose, must take and sit up with him!" put in Margery, without ceremony, in a resentful tone.

"No he didn't," said the man, looking at Margery, as if he did not understand her. "It was my turn to be up last night, and I was in and out of his room four or five times: but nobody stayed with him."

"But Mr. George Godolphin went with Captain St. Aubyn this morning?" said Thomas Godolphin to the man.

"Went where, sir?"

"Started with him,—on his journey."

"No, sir; not that I know of. I did not see him at the station."

Maria thought the man must be stupid. "Mr. George Godolphin returned to the Bell between eleven and twelve last night," she explained. "And he intended to accompany Captain St. Aubyn this morning on his journey."

"Mr. George was at the Bell for a few minutes just after eleven, ma'am. It was me that let him out. He did not come back again. And I don't think he was up at the train this morning. I'm sure he was not with Captain St. Aubyn, for I never left the captain till the train started."

Nothing further was said to the porter. He touched his hat, and went on his way. Maria's face wore an air of bewilderment. Thomas smiled at her.

"I think it is you who must be mistaken," Maria, said he. "Depend upon it, Mrs. Pain is right,—that he has gone to London."

"But why should he go to London without telling me?" deposed Maria. "Why say he was going with Captain St. Aubyn?"

Thomas could offer no opinion. Miss Meta began to stamp her pretty shoes, and to drag her mamma by the hand. She was impatient to depart.

They chose the way of the lonely Ash-tree walk. It was pleasant on a sunshiny day,—sunshine scares away ghosts,—and it was also the nearest.

As they were turning into it they met Charlotte Pain. Maria, simple-hearted and straightforward, never casting a suspicion to—to any thing undesirable, spoke at once of the uncertainty she was in as to her husband.

"Why do you think he has gone to London?" she asked.

"I know he has," replied Charlotte. "He told me he was going."

"But he told me he was only going with Captain St. Aubyn," returned Maria, a doubtful sound in her tone.

"Oh, my dear, gentlemen do not always find it desirable to keep their wives *au courant* of their little affairs."

Had it been salvation to her, Charlotte could not have helped lancing that shaft at Maria Godolphin. No,—not even regard for George's secrets stopped her. She had done the mischief by speaking to Isaac, and this opportunity was too glorious to be missed, so she braved it out. Had Charlotte dared—for her own sake—she could have sent forth an unlimited number of poisoned arrows daily at George Godolphin's wife: and she would have relished the sport amazingly. She sailed off,—a curiously conspicuous smile of triumph in her eyes as they were bent on Maria, her parting movement being a graciously condescending nod to the child.

Maria was recalled to her senses by the aspect of Margery. The woman was gazing after Charlotte with a dark, strange look,—a look that Maria understood as little as she understood Charlotte's triumphant one. Margery caught the eye of her mistress, and smoothed her face down with a short cough.

"I'm just a taking the pattern of her jacket, ma'am. It matches bravely with the pork-pie, it does. I wonder what the world'll come to next? The men'll take to women's clothes, I suppose,—now the women have took to men's. Meta, child, if I thought you'd ever make such a Jezebel of yourself when you grow up to be a woman, I'd—I'd——"

"What, Margery?" asked Meta, looking up.

"I'd like to take you along of me, first, when I'm put into my coffin. There!"

Mr. George—as you may remember—missed his train. And Mr. George debated whether he should command a special. Two reasons withheld him. One was, that his arriving at Prior's Ash by a special train might excite comment; the other, that a special train is expensive; and of late Mr. George Godolphin had not any too much of ready cash to spare. He waited for the next ordinary train, and that deposited him at Prior's Ash at seven o'clock.

He proceeded home at once. The bank was closed for the evening. Pierce admitted his master, who went into the dining-room. No sign of dinner,—no signs of occupation.

"My mistress is at Ashlydyat, sir. She went up this morning with Miss Meta and Margery. You would like dinner, sir, would you not?"

"I don't much care for it," responded George. "A bit of any thing. Has Mr. Godolphin been at the bank to-day?"

"Yes, sir. He has been here all day, I think."

George went into the bank-parlor, then to other of the business rooms. He was looking about for letters: he was looking at books: altogether he seemed to be busy. Presently he came out and called to Pierce.

"I want a light."

Pierce brought it. "I shall be engaged here for half an hour, Pierce," said his master. "Should anybody call, I cannot be disturbed,—under any pretence, you understand."

"Very well, sir," replied Pierce, as he withdrew. And George locked the intervening door between the house and the bank, and took out the key.

He went diving down a few stairs, the light in his hand; selected one of several keys which he had brought with him, and opened the door of a dry, vaulted room. It was the strong-room of the bank, secure and fire-proof.

"Safe, number three, on-right," he

read, consulting a bit of paper on which he had copied down the words in pencil up-stairs. "Number three? Then it must be this one."

Taking another of the keys, he put it into the lock. Turned it, and turned it about there, and—could not open the lock. George snatched it out and read the label. "Key of safe, number two."

"What an idiot I am! I have brought the wrong key!"

He went up-stairs again, grumbling at his stupidity, opened the cupboard where the keys were kept, and looked for the right one. Number three was the one he wanted. And number three was not there.

George stood transfixed. *He* had the custody of the keys. No other person had the power of approaching the place they were guarded in,—except his brother. Had the bank itself disappeared, George Godolphin could not have been much more astonished than at the disappearance of this key. Until this moment, this discovery of its absence, he would have been ready to swear that there it was, before all the judges of the land.

He tossed the keys here; he tossed them there; little heeding how he misplaced them. George became convinced that the fates were dead against him, in spiriting away, just because he wanted it, this particular key. That no one could have touched it but Thomas, he knew; and why he should have done so, George could not imagine. He could not imagine where it was, or could be, at the present moment. Had Thomas required it to visit the safe, he was by far too exact, too methodical, not to return it to its place again.

A quarter of an hour given to hunting, to thinking—and the thinking was not entirely agreeable thinking—and George gave it up in despair. "I must wait till to-morrow," was his conclusion. "If Thomas has carried it away with him, through forgetfulness, he will find it out and replace it then."

He was shutting the cupboard-door,

when something impeded it on its lower shelf, so that it would not close. Bringing the light inside, he found—the missing key. George himself must have dropped it there on first opening the cupboard. With a suppressed shout of delight, he snatched it up. A shout of delight! Better that George Godolphin had broken into a wail of lamentation!

He could not conceive how it could have got on that lower shelf. That he had dropped it, there was no doubt: but, according to all recognized rules of gravity, it ought to have fallen to the ground: it was certainly strange that it should have leaped on to the lower shelf, which lay under the other. "Janet would say that it was sent to me as a warning not to use the key—as I am about to use it," he said, musingly. The next moment he was going down the stairs to the strong-room, laughing at Janet and her superstition, the key in his hand.

Safe, number three, on the right, was unlocked without trouble now. In that safe there were some tin boxes, on one of which was inscribed "Lord Averil." Selecting another and a smaller key from those he held, George opened this.

It was full of papers. George looked them rapidly over with the quick eye of one accustomed to the work, and drew forth one of them. Rather a thick parcel,—some writing outside of it. This he thrust into his pocket, and began putting the rest in order. Had a mirror been held before him at that moment, it would have reflected a face utterly colorless.

Very soon he was on his way to Lady Godolphin's Folly, bearing with him the small packet sent by Mrs. Verrall,—a sufficient excuse for calling there, had George required an excuse, which he did not.

It was a light night; as it had been the previous one, though the moon was not yet very high. He gained the turnstile at the top of the Ash-tree walk—where he had been startled by the apparition of Thomas the night before, and Isaac Hastings had seen

Charlotte Pain that morning—and turned into the open way to the right. A few paces more, and he struck into the narrow pathway which would convey him through the grove of trees, leaving Ashlydyat and its approaches to the left.

Did George Godolphin love the darkness, that he should choose that road? Last night and again to-night he had preferred it. It was most unusual for any one to approach the Folly by that obscure path. A few paces round, and he would have skirted the thicket, would have gone on to the Folly in the bright, open moonlight. Possibly George scarcely noticed that he chose it,—full of thought, was he, just then.

He went along with his head down. What were his reflections? Was he wishing that he could undo the deeds of the last hour,—replace in that tin case what he had taken from it? Was he wishing that he could undo the deeds of the last few years,—be again a man without a cloud on his brow, a more heavy cloud on his heart? It was too late: he could recall neither the one nor the other. The deed was already on its way to London: the years had rolled into the awful PAST, with its doings, bad or good, recorded on high.

What was that? George lifted his head and his ears. A murmur of suppressed voices, angry voices, too, sounded near him, in one of which George thought he recognized the tones of Charlotte Pain. He pushed through to an intersecting path, so narrow that one person could with difficulty walk down it, just as a scream rang out on the night air.

Panting, scared, breathless, her face ghastly white, so far as George could see of it in the shaded light, her gauze dress torn by every tree with which it came in contact, flying down the narrow path, came Charlotte Pain. And—unless George Godolphin was strangely mistaken—some one else was flying in equal terror in the opposite direction of the path, as if they had just parted.

“Charlotte! What is it? Who has alarmed you?”

In the moment's first impulse he caught hold of her to protect her: in the second, he loosed his hold, and made after the other fugitive. The impression upon George's mind was, that some one, perhaps a stranger, had met Charlotte, and frightened her with rude words. “Who was it?” he called out,—and flew along swiftly.

But Charlotte was as swift as he. She flung her hands round George, and held him in. Strong arms they were always,—doubly strong in that moment of agitation. George could not unclasp them,—unless he had used violence.

“Stop where you are! Stop where you are for the love of Heaven!” she gasped. “You must not go.”

“What is all this? What is the matter?” he asked, in surprise.

She made no other answer. She clung to him with all her weight of strength, her arms and hands straining with the effort, reiterating wildly, “You must not go! you must not go!”

“Nay, I don't care to go,” replied George: “it was for your sake I was following. Be calm, Charlotte: there's no need of this agitation.”

She went on, down the narrow path, drawing him along behind her. The broader path gained,—though that was but a narrow one,—she put her arm within his, and turned towards the house. George could see her scared white face better now, and all the tricks and cosmetics invented could not hide it: he felt her heaving pulses; he heard her beating heart.

Bending down to her, he spoke with a soothing whisper. “Tell me what it was that terrified you.”

She would not answer. She only pressed his arm with a tighter pressure, lest he might break from her again in the pursuit; she pushed onwards with a quicker step. Skirting round the trees, when they emerged from them, which in front of the house made a half concave circle, Charlotte came to the end, and then darted

rapidly across the lawn to the terrace and into the house by one of the windows.

Her first movement was to close the shutters and bar them: her next to sit down on the nearest chair. White and ill as she looked, George could scarcely forbear a smile at her gauze dress: the bottom of its skirt was hanging in tatters.

"Will you let me get you something, Charlotte?—or ring for it?"

"I don't want any thing," she answered. "I shall be all right directly. How could you frighten me so?"

"I frighten you?" returned George. "It was not I who frightened you."

"Indeed it was. You and no one else. Did you not hear me scream?"

"I did."

"It was at you, rustling through the trees," persisted Charlotte. "I had gone out to see if the air would do any good to this horrid headache, which has stopped upon me since last night, and won't go away. I strolled into the thicket of trees, thinking of all sorts of lonely things, never suspecting that you or anybody else was near me, until the trees began to shake. I wonder I did not faint, as well as scream."

"Charlotte, what nonsense! You were whispering with some one,—some one who escaped in the opposite direction. Who was it?"

"I saw no one; I heard no one. Neither was I whispering."

He looked at her intently. That she was telling an untruth he believed, for he felt nearly positive that some second person *had* been there. "Why did you stop me, then, when I would have gone in pursuit?"

"It was your fault for attempting to leave me," was Charlotte's answer.

"I would not have remained by myself for a jar-full of gold."

"I suppose it is some secret. I think, whatever it may be, Charlotte, you might trust *me*." He spoke significantly,—a stress on the last word. Charlotte rose from her seat.

"So I would," she said, "were

there any thing to trust. Just look at me! My dress is ruined."

"You should take it up if you go amidst clumsy trees, whose rough trunks nearly meet."

"I had got it up—until you came," returned Charlotte, jumping upon a chair that she might survey it in one of the side glasses. "You startled me so that I dropped it. I might have it joined, and a lace flounce put upon it," she mused. "It cost a great deal of money, did this dress, I can tell you, Mr. George."

She jumped off the chair again, and George produced the packet confided to him by Mrs. Verrall.

"I promised her that you should have it to-night," he said. "Hence, my unfortunate appearance here, which it seems has so startled you."

"Oh, that's over now. When did you get back?"

"By the seven-o'clock train. I saw Verrall."

"Well?"

"It's not well. It's ill. Do you know what I begin to suspect at times? That Verrall and everybody else is playing me false. I am sick of the world."

"No he is not, George. If I thought he were, I'd tell you so. I would, on my sacred word of honor. It is not likely that he is. When we are in a bilious mood every thing wears to us a jaundiced tinge. You are in one to-night."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE TRADITION OF THE DARK PLAIN.

It is the province of little demiselles to be haughty: it is their delight to make golden promises and then break them, all false and fearless—as they may do over other affairs in later life. Miss Meta Godolphin was no exception. She had gravely promised her Uncle Thomas to be a good girl, and not run away to be

lost in unfrequented passages: yet no sooner had the young lady arrived at Ashlydyat and been released of her out-door things by Margery, than with a joyously defiant laugh of triumph, that would have rejoiced the heart of Charlotte Pain, she flew away off to the forbidden spot,—the unused passages. Had the little lady's motive been laid bare, it might have been found to consist of one tempting whole,—the enjoyment of a thing forbidden. Truth to say, Miss Meta was uncommonly prone to be disobedient to all persons, save one. That one was her mother. Maria had never spoken a sharp word to the child in her life, or used a sharp tone: but she had contrived to train the little one to obey, as well as to love. George, Margery, Mrs. Hastings, Miss Meta would openly disobey, and laugh in their faces while she did it: her mother, never. Meta remembered a scolding she received on the last visit she had paid to Ashlydyat, touching the remote passages—she had never found them out until then—and apparently the reminiscence of the scolding was so agreeable that she was longing for it to be repeated.

"Now," said Margery, as she finished the young lady's toilette, "you'll not go up to them old rooms and passages to-day, mind, Miss Meta!"

For answer, Miss Meta shook out her golden curls, laughed defiantly, and started off to the passages there and then. Maria had never said to her, "You must not go near those passages," and the commands of the rest of the world counted for nothing. Margery remained in blissful ignorance of the disobedience. She supposed the child had run to her mother and the Miss Godolphins. The objection to Meta's being in the passages alone, had no mysterious or covert element in it. It proceeded solely from a regard to her personal safety. The stair-case leading to the turret was unprotected; the loopholes in the turret were open, and a fall from either might cost the young lady her life. These places, the un-

frequented passages at the back of the second story, and the stair-case leading to the square turret above them, were shut in by a door, which closed them from the inhabited part of the house. This door Miss Meta had learned to open: and away she went, as her fancy led her.

Maria was in Miss Godolphin's room, talking to that lady and to Bessy. Bessy had been out visiting for a few days, but had returned the previous evening. "Where is it that George has gone?" Janet was asking of Maria. "Your brother Isaac said this morning that he was away."

"I cannot tell where he has gone: there appears to be some mistake over it," replied Maria. "George was called away from his guests last night to see Captain St. Aubyn, who was lying ill at the Bell. He came home soon after eleven, said the captain was very ill, and that he should return to sit up with him, and probably accompany him a stage or two in the morning."

"He must have returned home, then, direct from here," remarked Janet. "He came here with Thomas, whom he encountered in the Ash-tree walk——"

"But what brought George at all in the Ash-tree walk last night?" interrupted Maria. "Thomas said something about it, but I forgot to ask him again."

"He had been to Mr. Verrall's, he told Thomas."

"But Mr. Verrall is not at the Folly," objected Maria.

"Oh, he must have been paying an evening visit to Charlotte Pain," said Bessy, who rarely judged it necessary to conceal her thoughts and opinions.

"I fancy George is rather fond of paying evening visits to Mrs. Pain. Very foolish of him! I'm sure she's not worth it."

"It is Mrs. Pain who says he is gone to London: and not with Captain St. Aubyn," said Maria. "I cannot in the least understand it. If he had any intention of going to London, as Mrs. Pain says, he would not come

home and tell me he was going somewhere else."

"He said nothing to Thomas that he was going anywhere," observed Janet. "George——"

A sound overhead startled Janet and caused her to stop. Not that the sound, from its noise, could have startled any one. It was a very faint sound, and no ears, perhaps, save the ever-wakeful ones of Janet, would have detected it. The turret was built partially over Janet's room, and it was so unusual for any noise, or sound, to be heard in it, that Janet could not help being startled now. From year's-end to year's-end that lonely turret remained in silence, unless when invaded by Janet.

"Where's Meta?" hastily cried Janet, running out of the room. "She cannot have got up-stairs again! Margery! Where's the child?"

Margery at that moment happened to be putting the finishing touches to her own toilette. She came flying, without her cap, out of one of the many narrow passages and windings which intersected each other on that floor. "The child went off to you, ma'am as soon as I had tied her pinafore on."

"Then, Margery she's got into the turret. She never came to us."

Up to the turret hastened Janet; up to the turret followed Margery, capless as she was. Bessy and Maria traversed the passage leading to the turret-stairs, and stood there, looking up. Maria, had she been alone, could not have told which of the passages *would* lead her to the turret-stairs; and she could not understand why so much commotion need be made, although Meta had run up there. Strange as it may seem, Maria Godolphin, though so many years George's wife and the presumptive future mistress of Ashlydyat, had never been beyond that separating door. Miss Godolphin had never offered to take her beyond it, to show her the unused rooms and the turret; and Maria was of too sensitively refined a nature to ask it of her own accord.

Janet appeared, leading the rebel; Margery behind, scolding volubly. "Now," said Janet, when they reached the foot, "tell me, Meta, how it was that you could behave so disobediently, and go where you had been expressly told not to go?"

Meta shook back her golden curls with a laugh, sprang to Maria, and took refuge in her skirts. "Mamma did not tell me not to go," said she.

Janet looked at Maria: almost as if she would say, Can it be true that you have not?

"It is true," said Maria, answering the look. "I heard something about her running into the turret the last time she was here: I did not know it was of any consequence."

"She might fall through the loopholes," replied Janet. "Nothing could save her from being dashed to pieces."

Meta caught the child to her with an involuntary movement. "Meta, darling, do you hear? You must never go again."

Meta looked up fondly, serious now. Maria bent her face down on the little upturned one.

"Never again, darling; do not forget," she murmured. "Does Meta know that if harm came to her, mamma would never look up more? She would cry always."

Meta bustled out of her mamma's arms, and stood before Miss Godolphin, earnest decision on her little face. "Aunt Janet, Meta won't run away again."

And when the child made a voluntary promise like that, they knew that she would keep her word. Margery whirled her away, telling her in a high tone of a young lady of her own age who would do something that she was bade not to do: the consequence of which act was, that the next time she was out for a walk, she was run at by a bull with brass tips on his horns.

"Is the turret really dangerous?" inquired Maria.

"It is dangerous for a random child like Meta, who ventures into every hole and corner, without reference to

dirt or danger," was Miss Godolphin's answer. "Would you like to go up, Maria?"

"Yes, I should. I have heard George speak of the view from it."

"Mind, Maria, the stairs are narrow and winding," interposed Bessy.

Nevertheless they went up, passing the open loopholes which might be dangerous to Meta. The first thing that Maria's eyes encountered when they had reached the top, was a small bow of violet-colored ribbon. She stooped to pick it up.

"It is a bow off Janet's evening-dress," exclaimed Bessy. "Janet"—turning to her sister—"what can have brought it here?"

"I was up here last night," was the answer of Janet Godolphin, spoken with composure.

"That's just like you, Janet!" retorted Bessy. "To watch for that foolish Shadow, I suppose."

"Not to watch for it. To see it."

Bessy was afflicted with a taint of heresy. They had never been able to imbue her with the superstition pertaining to the Godolphins. Bessy had seen the Shadow more than once with her own eyes: but they were practical eyes and not imaginative, and could not be made to see any thing mysterious in it. "The shade is thrown by some tree or other," Bessy would say. And in spite of its being pointed out to her that there was no tree near, which *could* cast a shadow on the spot, Bessy obstinately held to her own opinion.

Maria gazed from the two sides of the turret. The view from both was magnificent. The one side overlooked the charming open country; the other, Prior's Ash. On the third side rose Lady Godolphin's Folly, standing out like a white foreground to the lovely expanse of scenery behind; the fourth side looked down on the Dark Plain.

"There's Charlotte Pain!" said Bessy.

Charlotte had returned home, it appeared, since Maria met her, and changed her attire. She was pacing the terrace in her riding-habit, a whip

in her hand and some dogs surrounding her. Maria turned towards the Dark Plain, and gazed upon it.

"Is it true," she timidly asked, "that the Shadow has been there for the last night or two?"

Janet answered the question by asking another. "Who told you it was there, Maria?"

"I heard Margery say it."

"Margery?" repeated Janet. "That woman appears to know by instinct when the Shadow comes. She dreams it, I think. It is true, Maria, that it has appeared again," she continued, in a tone of unnatural composure. "I never saw it so black as it was last night."

"Do you believe that there can be any thing in it,—that it is a foreboding of ill?" asked Maria.

"I know that it is the tradition handed down with our house; I know that, in my own experience, the Shadow never came but it brought ill," was the reply of Miss Godolphin.

"Janet, I have never seen the Shadow but once," resumed Maria. "And I could not see much of it then, for George hurried me away. It was the night that we reached home after our marriage."

"And pray, if it be Heaven's pleasure, that you may never see it again!" broke from Janet in answer.

"What caused the superstition to arise in the first instance?" asked Maria.

"Has George never told you the tale?" replied Janet.

"Never. He says he does not remember it clearly enough."

"It is to be hoped he may never have cause to remember it more clearly!" was the severe rejoinder of Janet. For a Godolphin to forget, or to profess to forget, the house tradition, was rank heathenism in the sight of Janet.

"Will you not tell it me, Janet?"

Janet hesitated. "One of the early Godolphins brought a curse upon the house," she at length slowly began. "It was that evil ancestor whose memory we would bury, were it practicable; he who earned for himself

the title of the Wicked Godolphin. He killed his wife——”

“Killed his wife!” interrupted Maria, somewhat startled.

“Killed her by gradual and long-continued ill treatment,” explained Janet, whose voice had sunk to a hushed tone. “He wanted her out of the way that another might fill her place. He pretended to have discovered that she was not worthy: than which assertion nothing could be more shameful and false, for she was one of the best ladies ever created. She was a De Commins, daughter of the warrior Richard de Commins, who was brave as she was good. The Wicked Godolphin turned her coffin out of the house on to the Dark Plain, there”——pointing down to the open space in front of the archway——“there to remain until the day came for interment to bring home his second wife.”

“Not wait!” exclaimed Maria, her eager ears drinking in the story.

“The manners in those early days will scarcely admit of an allusion to them in these,” continued Janet: “they savor of what is worse than barbarism,—sin. The father, Richard de Commins, heard of his child’s death, and hastened to Ashlydyat, arriving by moonlight. The first sounds he encountered were the revels of the celebration of the second marriage; the first sight he saw was the coffin of his daughter on the open plain, a pall covering it, and two of her faithful women attendants sitting, the one at the head, the other at the foot, mourning the dead. While he halted there, kneeling to say a prayer, it was told to the Wicked Godolphin that de Commins had arrived. He—that Wicked Godolphin—rushed madly out and drew his sword upon him as he knelt. De Commins was wounded, but not badly, and he rose to defend himself. There ensued a combat, De Commins having no resource but to fight, and he was killed,—was murdered. Weary with his journey, enfeebled by age, weakened by grief, his foot slipped, and the wicked Godolphin, stung to

fury by the few words of reproach De Commins had had time to speak, deliberately ran him through as he lay. In the moment of death, De Commins cursed the Godolphins, prophesied that the shadow of his daughter’s bier, as it appeared then, should remain to bring a curse upon the Godolphin’s house forever.”

“But how do you believe the story?” cried Maria, breathlessly.

“How much of it may be true and how much of it addition, I cannot decide,” said Janet. “One fact is indisputable: that a shadow, bearing the exact resemblance of a bier, with a mourner at its head and another at its foot, does appear capriciously on that Dark Plain: and that it never yet showed itself, but some grievous ill followed for the Godolphins.”

“Janet,” cried Maria, leaning forward, her own tones hushed, “is it possible that one, in dying, can curse a whole generation, so that the curse shall take effect?”

“Hush, child!” rebuked Janet. “It does not become us to inquire into these things. They are far, far above the ken of our poor earthly wisdom. I do not attempt to enter upon it. Were I to say, of my own decision, God does permit this curse to remain and to take effect upon us, the descendants of that wicked man: were I, on the contrary, to fling it from me in derision, to say, it is folly, no such thing as a curse can hold its effect; all that has happened to us of ill, happens by accident, the appearance of the shadow is but an accident, induced by natural causes, though we cannot find the precise clue to them—I should be only a degree less wicked than that dead-and-gone Godolphin. We must be content to leave these things. They can never be decided, until all the mysteries of this lower world shall be cleared up by means of that Light which has not yet entered it. Controversy on them is utterly bootless, worse than profitless; for there will be believers and disbelievers to the end of time. You wished me to tell you the story, Maria, and I have done so. I do not

more. I do not tell you it is to be believed, or it is not to be believed. Let every one decide for himself, according as his reason, his instinct, or his judgment shall prompt him. People accuse me of being foolishly superstitious, touching this Shadow and these old traditions. I can only say the superstition has been forced upon me by experience. When the Shadow appears, I cannot shut my eyes to it and say 'It is not there.' It is there: and all I do, is to look at it, and speculate. When the evil, which *invariably* follows the appearance of the Shadow, falls, I cannot close my heart to it, and say, in the teeth of facts, 'No evil has happened.' The Shadow never appeared, Maria, but it brought ill in its wake. It is appearing again now: and I am as certain that some great ill is in store, as that I am talking with you at this moment. In this point I *am* superstitious."

A pause ensued. Bessy Godolphin was watching the distant movements of Charlotte Pain. Bessy's mind would not admit of superstition: it appeared to be constituted dead against it: but Bessy did not cast to it ridicule, as George sometimes would. Maria broke the silence.

"It is a long while, is it not, since the Shadow last appeared?"

"It is years. The last time it appeared, was the time you have just alluded to, Maria: the night you first came up here after your marriage."

"How did you know that it appeared that night?" asked Maria, in her surprise.

"Child," gravely answered Janet, "there are few times it has been seen that I have not known it."

Maria wondered whether Janet came up every night to the turret to gaze on the Dark Plain. It was not unlikely. Janet resumed.

"I have not quite finished the story. The Wicked Godolphin killed Richard de Commins, and buried him that night on the Dark Plain. In his fury and passion he called his servants around him, ordered a grave to be dug, and helped with his own hands. De Com-

mins was put into it without the rites of burial. Tradition runs that so long as the bones remain unfound, the place will retain the appearance of a graveyard. They have been often searched for. That Tragedy no doubt gave the name to the place, 'Dark Plain.' It cannot be denied that the place does wear much the appearance of a graveyard,—especially by moonlight."

"It is the effect of the low gorse bushes," said Bessy. "They grow in a peculiar form. I know I would have those bushes rooted up, were I master of Ashlydyat!"

"Your father had it done, Bessy, and they sprung up again," replied Janet. "You must remember it."

"It could not have been done effectually," was Bessy's answer. "Papa must have had lazy men to work, who left the roots in. I would dig it all up, and make a ploughed field of it."

"Did he do any other harm—that Wicked Godolphin?" asked Maria.

"He! other harm!" reiterated Janet, something like indignation at Maria's question, mingling with the surprise in her tone. "Don't you know that it was he who gambled away Ashlydyat? After that second marriage of his, he took to worse and worse courses. It was said that his second wife proved a match for him, and they lived together like two evil demons. All things considered, it was perhaps a natural sequence that they should so live," added Janet, in a severe tone. "And in the end he cut off the entail and gambled away the estate. Many years elapsed before the Godolphins could get it back again."

Maria was longing to put a question. She had heard that there were other superstitious marvels attaching to Ashlydyat, but she scarcely liked to mention them direct to the Miss Godolphins. George never would explain any thing: he always turned it off with laughing raillery. "Is there not some superstition connected with the old passages here?" she at length ventured to say.

"Tradition goes that before the fall

of Ashlydyat, a sound, the like of which had never been heard for intensity and fearfulness, resounded through the passages and shook the house to its centre. It was the warning of its fall. Since then, a strange noise, as of the wind whistling, has occasionally been heard in the passages——”

“I do not quite understand, Janet, what you mean by the fall of Ashlydyat,” interrupted Maria.

“When it fell from the Godolphins,——when the Wicked Godolphin brought the evil upon the race, and then gambled the house away. Tradition goes that the same sound will come as a warning before the second fall.”

“When it——” Maria stopped and hesitated.

“When it shall pass away finally from the Godolphins,” explained Janet.

“You—think,—then,—that it will pass away from them?”

Janet shook her head. “We have been reared in the belief,” she answered. “That the estate is to pass finally away from them the Godolphins have been taught to fear ever since that unhappy time. Each generation, as they have come into possession, have accepted it as an uncertain tenure,—as a thing that might last them for their time, or might pass away from them ere their sojourn on earth was completed. The belief was—nay the tradition was—that so long as a reigning Godolphin held by Ashlydyat, Ashlydyat would hold by him and his. My father was the first to break it.”

Janet had taken up her dress, and sat down on a faded, dusty, crimson bench, the only article of furniture of any description that the small square room contained. The strangely speculative look—it was scarcely an earthly one—had come into her eyes: and though she answered when spoken to, she appeared to be lost in sad, inward thought. Maria, somewhat awe-struck with the turn the conversation had taken, with the words altogether, stood against the opposite window, her delicate hands clasped before her,

her face slightly bent forward, pale and grave.

“Then, do you fear that the end for the Godolphins is—is at hand?” resumed Maria.

“I seem to see that it is,” replied Janet. “I have looked for it ever since my father left Ashlydyat. I might say—but that I should be laughed at, worse than I am, for a speculative idealist—that the strangers to whom he resigned it in his place, would have some bearing upon our fall, would in some way conduce to it. I think of these things ever,” continued Janet, almost as if she would apologize for the wildness of the confession. “They seem to unfold themselves to me, to become clear and more clear,—to be no longer fanciful fears that dart across the brain, but realities of life.”

Maria’s lips slightly parted as she listened. “But the Verralls have left Ashlydyat a long while?” she presently said.

“I know they have. But they were the usurpers of it for the time. Better—as I believe—that my father had shut it up,—better, far better, that he had never quitted it! He knew it also,—and it preyed upon him on his death-bed.”

“Oh, Janet, the ill may not come in our time!”

“It may not. I am anxious to believe it may not, in defiance of the unalterable conviction that has seated itself within me. Let it pass, Maria; talking of it will not avert it: indeed, I do not know how I came to be betrayed into it.”

“But you did not finish telling me about the sounds in the passages?” urged Maria, as Janet rose from her dusty seat.

“There’s nothing more to tell. Peculiar sounds, as if caused by the wind, are heard. Moaning, sighing, rushing,—the passages at times seem alive with them. It is said to come as a reminder to the Godolphins of that worse sound that will sometime be heard when Ashlydyat shall be passing away.”

“But you don't believe that?” breathlessly uttered Maria.

“Child, I can scarcely tell you what I believe,” was Janet's answer. “I can only pray that the one-half of what my heart prompts me to fear may never have place in reality. That the noise does come in the passages, and without any apparent cause, is not a matter of belief, or non-belief: it is a fact, patent to all who have inhabited Ashlydyat. The Verralls can tell you so: they have had their rest broken by it.”

“And it is not caused by the wind?” Janet shook her head in dissent. “It has come on the calmest and stillest night, when there has not been a breath of air to move the leaves of the ash-trees.”

Bessy turned round from her pastime of watching Charlotte Pain: she had taken little part in the conversation.

“I wonder at you, Janet. You will be setting Maria against Ashlydyat. She'll be frightened to come into it should it lapse to George.”

“Maria looked at her with a smile. “I should have no fear with him, superstitious or otherwise. If George took me to live in the catacombs I could be brave with him.”

Ever the same blind faith,—the unchanged love in her husband. Better, far better, that it should be so!

“For my part, I am content to take life and its good as I find it; and not waste my time in unprofitable dreams,” was the practical remark of Bessy. “If any ill is to come, it must come; but there's no need to look out for it beforehand.”

“There must be dreamers and there must be workers,” answered Janet, picking her way down the winding stairs. “We were not all born into the world with the same constituted minds, or to fulfil the same parts in life.”

The day passed on. Thomas Godolphin came home in the evening to dinner, and said George had not returned. Maria wondered. It grew later. Margery went home with Me-

ta,—who thought she was hardly used at having to go home before her mamma.

“I had rather you would stay, Maria,” Thomas said to her. “I particularly wish to say a word to George to-night on business matters: if he finds you are here when he returns, he will come up.”

George did find so—as you already know. And when he quitted Mrs. Charlotte Pain, her torn dress and her other attractions, he bent his steps towards Ashlydyat. But, instead of going the most direct road to it, he took his way through that thicket where he had had the encounter an hour previously with Charlotte. There was a little spice of mystery about it which excited Mr. George's curiosity. That some one had parted from her, he felt convinced, in spite of her denial. And that she was in a state of excitement, of agitation, far beyond anything he had ever witnessed in Charlotte Pain, was indisputable. George's thoughts went back, naturally, to the previous night,—to the figure he had seen, and whom his eyes, his conviction, had told him was Charlotte. She had positively denied it, had said she had not quitted the drawing-room; and George had found her there, apparently composed and stationary. Nevertheless, though he had then yielded to her word, he began now to suspect that his own conviction had been a correct one; that the dark and partially disguised figure had been no other than Charlotte herself. It is probable that, however powerful was the hold Charlotte's fascinations may have taken upon the senses of Mr. George Godolphin, his *trust* in her, in her truth and single-heartedness, was not of the most implicit nature. What mystery was connected with Charlotte, or who she met in the thicket, or whether she met anybody, she best knew. George's curiosity was sufficiently excited upon the point to induce him to walk with a slow step and searching eyes, lest happily he might come upon somebody or something which should explain the puzzle.

How runs the old proverb? "A watched-for thing never comes." I forget the exact words, but those are near enough to explain the meaning. In vain George halted and listened; in vain he peered into every part of the thicket within his view. Not a step was to be heard, not a creature to be seen; and he emerged from the trees, ungratified. Crossing the open grass by the turnstile he turned round by the ash-trees, to the Dark Plain.

Turned round, and started. George Godolphin's thoughts had been on other things than the Shadow. The Shadow lay there, so pre-eminently black, so menacing, that George positively started. Somehow—fond as he was of ignoring the superstition—George Godolphin did not like its looks that night.

Upon entering Ashlydyat, his first interview was with Thomas. They remained for a few minutes alone. Thomas had business affairs to speak of: and George—it is more than probable—made some good excuse for his day's absence. That it would be useless to deny he had been to London, he knew. Charlotte had set him on his guard. Janet and Bessy put innumerable questions to him when he joined them, on the score of his absence; but he treated it in his usual light, joking manner, contriving to tell them nothing. Maria did not say a word then: she left it until they should be alone.

"You will tell me, George, will you not?" she gently said, as they were walking home together.

"Tell you what, my darling?"

"Oh, George, you know what,"—and her tone, as Mr. George's ears detected, bore its sound of pain. "If you were going to London then, when you left me, why did you deceive me by saying you were going where you did say?"

"You goose! Do you suppose I said it to deceive you?"

There was a lightness, an untruthfulness in his words, in his whole air and manner, which struck with the utmost pain upon Maria's heart.

"Why did you say it?" was all she answered.

"Maria, I'll tell you the truth," said he, becoming serious and confidential. "I wanted to run up to town on a little pressing matter of business, and I did not care that it should become patent in the bank. Had I known that I should be away for the day, of course I should have told Thomas: but I fully intended to be home in the afternoon: therefore I said nothing about it. I missed the train, or I should have been home."

"You might have told me," she sighed. "I would have kept your counsel."

"So I would, had I thought you deemed it of any consequence," replied George.

Consequence! Maria walked on a few minutes in silence, her arm lying very spiritless within her husband's. "If you did not tell me," she resumed, in a low tone, "why did you tell Mrs. Pain?"

"Mrs. Pain's a donkey," was George's rejoinder. And it is probable Mr. George at that moment was thinking her one: for his tone, in its vexation, was real enough. "My business in town was connected with Verrall, and I dropped a hint, in the hearing of Mrs. Pain, that I might probably follow him to town. At any rate, I am safe home again, Maria, so no great harm has come of my visit to London," he concluded, in a gayer tone.

"What time did you get in, George?" she asked.

"By the seven-o'clock train."

"The seven-o'clock train," she repeated, in surprise. "And have only now come up to Ashlydyat!"

"I found a good many things to do after I got home," was Mr. George's rejoinder.

"Did you see Meta? Margery took her home at eight o'clock."

Mr. George Godolphin had not seen Meta. Mr. George could have answered, had it so pleased him, that before the child reached home, he had departed on his evening visit to Lady Godolphin's Folly.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE DEAD ALIVE AGAIN.

SATURDAY was a busy day at Prior's Ash; it was a busy day at the banking-house of Godolphin, Crosse, and Godolphin. Country towns and country banks always are more busy on a market-day.

George Godolphin sat in the manager's room, full of business. Not much more than a week had elapsed since that visit of his to London; and it was now Thomas's turn to be away. Thomas had gone to town. His errand there was to consult one of the first surgeons of the day, on the subject of his own health. Not so much that he had hope from the visit, as that it would be a satisfaction to his family to have made it.

George Godolphin was full of business. Full of talking also. A hearty country client, one who farmed a great number of acres, and generally kept a good round sum in the bank's coffers, was with him. What little point of business he had had occasion to see one of the partners upon, was concluded, and he and George were making merry together, enjoying a gossip as to the state of affairs in general and particular, out-door and in. Never a man more free from care (if appearances might be trusted) than George Godolphin! When that hearty, honest farmer went forth, he would have been willing to testify that, of carking care, George possessed none.

As he went out, George sat down and bent over some account-books. His face had changed. Lines, of what looked worse than care, grew out full in it, and he lifted his hand to his brow with a weary gesture. Another minute, and he was interrupted again. He did not get much peace on a market-day.

"Lord Averil wishes to see you, sir," said one of the clerks. It was Isaac Hastings.

To any other announced name, George Godolphin's ready answer would have been, "Show him in."

To that of Lord Averil he evidently hesitated, and a sudden flush dyed his face. Isaac, keen in observation as was his father, as was his sister, Grace, noticed it. To him, it looked like a flush of shrinking fear.

"Did he ask for me?"

"He asked for Mr. Godolphin, sir. He says it will be the same thing if he sees you. Shall I show him in?"

"Of course," replied George. "What do you stop for?"

He rose from his seat; he put a chair or two in place; he turned to the table, and laid rapidly some of its papers one upon another,—all in a fuss and bustle, not in the least characteristic of George Godolphin. Isaac thought his master must have lost his usual presence of mind. As to the reproach addressed to himself, "What do you stop for?"—it had never been the custom to show clients into the presence of the partners without first asking for permission.

Lord Averil came in. George, only in that short time, had grown entirely himself again. They chatted a minute of passing topics, and Lord Averil mentioned that he had not known, until then, that Mr. Godolphin was in London.

"He went up on Thursday," observed George. "I expect he will be back early in the week."

"I intend to be in London myself next week," said Lord Averil. "Will it be convenient for me to have those bonds of mine to-day?" he continued.

A sudden coursing on of all George's pulses,—a whirling rush in his brain. "Bonds?" he mechanically answered.

"The bonds of that stock which your father bought for me years ago," explained Lord Averil. "They were deposited here for security. Don't you know it?"—looking at George's countenance, which seemed to speak only of perplexity. "Mr. Godolphin would know."

"Oh yes, yes," replied George, catching up his breath and his courage.

"It is all right: I did not remember for the moment. Of course—the deposited bonds."

"I am thinking of selling out," said Lord Averil. "Indeed, I have been for some time thinking of it, but have idly put it off. If it would be quite convenient to give me the bonds, I would take them to town with me. I shall go on Monday or Tuesday."

Now, George Godolphin, rally your wits! What are you to answer? George did rally them, after a lame fashion. Confused words, which neither he nor Lord Averil precisely understood—to the effect that in Thomas Godolphin's absence, he, George, did not know exactly where to put his hand upon the securities—came forth. So Lord Averil courteously begged him not to take any trouble about it. He would let them remain until another opportunity.

He shook hands cordially with George, and went out, with a mental comment, "Not half the man of business that his brother is, and his father was: but wondrously like Cecil!" George watched the door close. He wiped the great dewdrops which had gathered on his face; he looked round with the beseeching air of one seeking relief from some intense pain. Had Lord Averil persisted in his demand, what would have remained for him? *Those* are the moments in which man has been tempted to resort to the one irredeemable sin,—self-destruction.

The door opened again, and George gave a gasp like one in an agony. It was only Isaac Hastings. "Mr. Hurde wishes to know, sir, whether those bills are to go up to Glyn's to-day or Monday?"

"They had better go to-day," replied George. "Has Mr. Barnaby been in to-day?" he added, as Isaac was departing.

"Not yet."

"If he does not come soon, some one must go down to the corn-market to him. He is sure to be there. That is, if he is in town to-day."

"I know he is in town," replied Isaac. "I saw him as I was coming back from dinner. He was talking to Mr. Verrall."

"To Mr. Verrall!" almost shouted George, looking up as if he was electrified into life. "Is he back?"

"He is back, sir. I think he had but arrived then. He was coming from the way of the railway-station."

"You are *sure* it was Mr. Verrall?" reiterated George.

Isaac Hastings smiled. What could make Mr. George Godolphin so eager? "I am sure it was Mr. Verrall."

George felt as if a whole ton weight of care had been lifted off him. He had been so long in the habit of flying to Mr. Verrall to stave off his difficulties, that it seemed to him that it would only cost the going to him to stave off the one that was hanging over him now. Mr. Verrall had generally accomplished the task as men of his profession do accomplish such tasks,—by the laying up an awful day of reckoning for the future. That day was not now far off for George Godolphin.

The bank closed later on Saturdays, and George remained at his post to the end. Then he dined. Then, at the dusk hour—nay, at the dark hour—he went out to Lady Godolphin's Folly. Why was it that he rarely went to the Folly now, save under the covert shades of night? Did he fear people might comment on his intimacy with Mr. Verrall, and seek a clue to its cause? or did he fear the world's gossip on another score?

George arrived at Lady Godolphin's Folly, and was admitted to an empty room. "Mr. Verrall was returned, and had dined with Mrs. Pain, but had gone out after dinner," the servant said. He had believed Mrs. Pain to be in the drawing-room. Mrs. Pain was evidently not there, in spite of the man's searching eyes. He looked into the next room, with equal result.

"Perhaps, sir, she has stepped out on the terrace with her dogs?" observed the man.

George—ungallant as it was!—cared not where Mrs. Pain might have stepped at the present time: his

anxiety was for Mr. Verrall. "Have you any idea when your master will be in?" he inquired of the servant.

"I don't think he'll be long, sir. I heard him say he was tired, and should get to bed early. He may have gone to Ashlydyat. He told Mrs. Pain that he had met Mr. Godolphin in town yesterday, and he should call and tell Miss Godolphin that he was better in London than he had felt here. I don't know, sir, though, that he meant he should call to-night."

The man left the room, and George remained alone. He drummed on the table; he tried several seats in succession; he got up and looked at his face in the glass. A haggard face then. Where was Verrall? Where was Charlotte? She might be able to tell him where Verrall had gone and when he would be in. Altogether, George was in a state of restlessness little more tolerable to endure than torture.

He impatiently opened the glass doors, which were only closed, not fastened, and stood a few moments looking out on the night. He gazed in all directions, but could see nothing of Charlotte: and Mr. Verrall did not appear to come. "I'll see," suddenly exclaimed George, starting off, "whether he is at Ashlydyat."

He did well. Action is better than inertness at these moments. Standing outside the porch at Ashlydyat, talking to a friend, was Andrew, one of their servants. When he saw George, he drew back to hold open the door for him.

"Are my sisters alone, Andrew?"

"Yes, sir."

George scarcely expected the answer, and it disappointed him. "Quite alone?" he reiterated. "Has no one called on them to-night?"

The man shook his head, wondering probably who Mr. George might be expecting to call. "They are all alone, sir. Miss Janet has got one of her bad headaches."

George did not want to go in, Mr. Verrall not being there, and this last

item of news afforded him an excuse for retreating without doing so. "Then I'll not disturb her to-night," said he. "You need not say that I came up, Andrew."

"Very well, sir."

He quitted Andrew and turned off to the left, deep in thought, striking into a covert path. It was by no means the direct road back to the Folly: or to Prior's Ash, either. In point of fact, it led to nothing but the Dark Plain and its superstition. Not a woman-servant of Ashlydyat, perhaps not one of its men, would have gone down that path at night: for its egress at the other end was close to the archway, before which the Shadow was wont to show itself.

Why did George take it? He could not have told. Had he been asked why, he might have said that one way, to a man bending under a sharp weight of trouble, is the same as another. True. But the path led him to no part where he could wish to go: and he would have to pick his way to Lady Godolphin's Folly amid the gorse bushes of the Dark Plain, right over the very Shadow itself. These apparently chance steps, which seem to take their own way without any premeditation or guidance of ours, do sometimes lead to strange results.

George went along moodily, his hands in his pockets, his footfalls slow and light. But for the latter fact, he might not have had the pleasure of disturbing a certain scene that was taking place under cover of the dark part of the archway.

Was it a ghost, enacting it? Scarcely,—unless ghosts meet in couples. Two forms, ghostly or human, were there. One of them looked like a woman's. It was in dark clothes, and a dark shawl was folded over the head, not, however, hiding the features,—and they were those of Charlotte Pain. She, at any rate, was not ghostly. The other, George took to be Mr. Verrall. He was leaning against the brick-work, in apparently as hopeless a mood as George himself was in.

They were holding a quarrel. Strange that they should leave the house and come to this lonely spot in the grounds of Ashlydyat, to hold it! Charlotte was evidently in one of her angry tempers. She paced to and fro underneath the archway, something like a restrained tiger, pouring forth a torrent of sharp words and reproaches, all in a suppressed tone.

"I'll tell you what it is," she said, were the first distinct words of anger George caught. But her companion interrupted her, his tone one of mourning and humility.

"I'll tell you what it is, Charlotte——"

The start made by George Godolphin at the tones of the voice, the involuntary sound of utter astonishment that escaped him, disturbed them. Charlotte, with a cry of terror, darted one way: her companion another.

But the latter was not quick enough to elude George Godolphin. Springing forward, George caught him in his powerful grasp, really to assure himself that it was no ghost, but genuine flesh and blood. Then George turned the face to the starlight, and recognized the features of the dead-and-gone, Mr. Rodolf Pain.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A WELCOME HOME.

THE return of a husband, popularly supposed to be dead and out of the way for good, may be regarded by the wife as a charming blessing of some special providence, or as a source of annoying embarrassment, according to the lady's private feelings on the subject. There's no doubt that Charlotte Pain looked upon it, and most unmistakably so, in the latter light. Charlotte knew, better than the public, that Mr. Rodolf Pain was not dead; but she had fully believed him to be as surely out of her way as though death and some safe metro-

politan cemetery had irrevocably claimed him. Whatever trifling accident may have happened to put Mr. Rodolf Pain and the British criminal law at issue, Charlotte, at any rate, had assumed it one not to be conveniently got over, except by the perpetual exile of the gentleman from the British shores. When the little affair had occurred, and Mr. Rodolf had saved himself and his liberty by only a hair-breadth, choosing a foreign exile and a false name in preference to some notoriety at a certain court (a court which does not bear a pleasant sound, and rises ominous and dark and gloomy in the heart of the city; which holds an hour's festival now and then on a Monday morning, when the sober part of London are breakfasting, and the curious part are flocking to the scene in shoals, in the gratification of their eyes and their minds), it had pleased Charlotte and those connected with her to give out that Mr. Rodolf Pain had died. In Mr. Rodolf Pain's going out of the world by death, there was certainly no disgrace, provided that he went out naturally; that is, without what may be called malice prepense on his own part. But, for Mr. Rodolf Pain to be compelled to make his exit from London society after another fashion, was quite a different affair,—an affair which could never have been tolerated by Charlotte: not on his score, but on her own. Any superfluous consideration for him, Charlotte had never been troubled with. Before her marriage, she had regarded him in the light of a non-entity; since that ceremony, as an incumbrance. Therefore, on the whole, Charlotte was tolerably pleased to get rid of him, and she played her rôle of widow to perfection. No inconvenient disclosure, as to the facts of his hasty exit, had come out to the public, it having fortunately happened that the transaction, or transactions, which led to it, had not been done in his own name. To describe Charlotte's dismay when he returned, and she found her fond assumption of his perpetual exile to have been a false

security, would take a cleverer pen than mine. No other misfortune, known to earth, could have been looked upon by Charlotte as so dire a calamity. The blowing-up of Prior's Ash, herself included, by some sprung mine, or the swallowing it down by an earthquake, would have been little, in comparison.

It certainly was not pleasant to be startled by a faint tap at the un-screened window, while she sat under the chandelier, busy at what she so rarely attempted, some useless fancy-work. Yet that was the unceremonious manner in which her husband made his return known to her. Charlotte was expecting no visitors that night. It was the night of George Godolphin's dinner-party, at which Mr. Verrall had *not* appeared, having started for London instead. When the tapping came, Charlotte turned her head full towards the window in surprise. Nobody was in the habit of entering that way, save free-and-easy George Godolphin; he would, now and then: sometimes Mr. Verrall. But Charlotte knew of George's dinner, and Mr. Verrall was away. She could see nothing of the intruder: the room was ablaze with light; outside, it was, comparatively speaking, dark; and the window was also partially shaded by its lace curtains.

The tapping came again. "Very odd!" thought Charlotte. "Come in," she called out.

Nobody came in. There was no response at all to it for a minute or two. Then there came another timid tapping.

Charlotte's dress was half covered with cotton. She had been ravelling out a crochet mat, and the long line of cotton rested upon her. She rose, let the cotton and the mat (what remained of it whole) fall to the ground, walked to the window, and opened it.

At the first moment she could see nothing. It was bright moonlight, and she had come from the blazing, yellow, garish light inside, beside which that outer light was so cold and pure. Not for that reason could she

see nothing, but because there appeared to be nothing to see. She ranged her eyes in vain over the terrace, over the still landscape beyond.

"Charlotte!"

It was the faintest possible voice, and close to her. Faint as it was, though, there was that in its tone which struck on every fibre of Charlotte's frame with dismay. Gathered flat against the walls of the Folly, making a pretence to shelter himself beyond a brilliant cape-jessamine which was trained there,—as if hoping that any straggling eyes might take him for another jessamine,—was the slight figure of a man. A mere shred of a man, with a shrinking, attenuated frame: the frame of one who has lived in some long and great agony, bodily or mental; and a white face that shivered as he stood.

Not more white, not more shivering than Charlotte's. Her complexion,—well, you have heard of it, as one too much studied to allow any vulgar changes to come upon it, in a general way. But there are moments in a lifetime when Nature asserts her supremacy, and Art slinks down before her. Charlotte's face turned the hue of the dead, and Charlotte's dismay broke forth in a low, passionate wail. It was Rodolf Pain.

A moment of terrified bewilderment; a torrent of rapid words; not of sympathy, of greeting, but of anger; and Charlotte was pushing him off with her hands, she neither knew nor cared whither. It was dangerous for him to be there, she said. He must go.

"I'll go into the thicket, Charlotte," he answered, pointing to the close trees on the left. "Come to me there."

He glided off towards it as he spoke, keeping under cover of the walls. Charlotte, feeling that she should like to decline the invitation had she dared, enveloped her head and shoulders in a black shawl, and followed him. Nothing satisfactory came of the interview,—except recrimination. Charlotte was in a towering passion that

he should have ventured back at all; Rodolf complained that between them all he had been made the scapegoat. In returning home, she caught sight of George Godolphin approaching the house, just as she was about to steal across the lawn. Keeping under cover of the trees, she got in-doors by a back entrance, and sat down to her work in the drawing-room, protesting to George, when he was admitted, that she had not been out. No wonder her face looked white!

Her interviews with Rodolf Pain appeared to be ill-chosen. On the following night she met him in the same place: he had insisted upon it, and she did not dare refuse. More recrimination, more anger; in the midst of which, George Godolphin again broke upon them. Charlotte uttered a scream in her terror, and Rodolf Pain ran away. But for Charlotte's laying her detaining hands on George, the returned man might have been discovered then.

A few days more, and that climax was to arrive. The plantation appearing unsafe, Rodolf Pain proposed the archway. There they should surely be unmolested: the ghostly fears of the neighborhood and of Ashlydyat keeping that spot at bay. And there, two or three times, had Charlotte met him, when they were again intruded upon, and again by George. This time to some purpose.

George Godolphin's astonishment was excessive. In his wildest flights of fancy he had never given a thought to the suspicion that Rodolf Pain could be alive. Charlotte had been no more confidential with George than with the rest of the world. Making a merit of what could not well be avoided, she told him a few particulars now.

For, when she looked back in her flight, and saw that Rodolf Pain was fairly caught, that there was no further possibility of the farce of his death being kept up to George, she deemed it well to turn back. Better bring *her* managing brains to the explanation, than leave it to that simple calf, whom she had the honor of calling husband.

The fact was, Rodolf Pain had never been half cunning enough, half rogue enough, for the work assigned him by Mr. Verrall. He—Mr. Verrall—had always said that Rodolf had brought the trouble upon himself, in consequence of trying to exercise a little honesty. Charlotte coincided in the opinion: and every contemptuous epithet cast by Mr. Verrall to the unfortunate exile, Charlotte fully echoed.

George was some little time before he could understand the explanation, so much of it as was vouchsafed him. They stood under the shade of the archway, in a group, Charlotte keeping her black shawl well over her head and round her face; Rodolf, his arms folded, leaning against the inner circle of the stonework.

"What do you say sent you abroad?" questioned George, somewhat bewildered.

"It was that wretched business of Appleby's," replied Rodolf Pain. "You must have heard of it. The world heard enough of it."

"Appleby—Appleby? Yes, I remember," remarked George. "A nice swindle it was. But what had you to do with it?"

"In point of fact, I only had to do with it at second-hand," said Rodolf Pain, his tone one of bitter meaning. "It was Verrall's affair,—as every thing else is. I only executed his orders."

"But surely neither you nor Verrall had any thing to do with that swindling business of Appleby's?" cried George, his voice as full of amazement as the other's was of bitterness.

Charlotte interposed, her manner so eager, so flurried, as to impart the suspicion that she must have some personal interest in it. "Rodolf, hold your tongue! Where's the use of reaping up this old speculative nonsense to Mr. George Godolphin? He does not care to hear about it."

"I'd reap it up to all the world if I could," was Rodolf's answer, ringing with its own sense of injury. "Verrall told me in the most solemn manner that if things ever cleared, through

Appleby's death, or in any other way, so as to make it safe for me to come back, that that hour he'd send for me. Well: Appleby's dead; has been dead these six months, and yet he leaves me on, on, on, there in the New World, without so much as a notice of it. Now, it's of no use your growing fierce, Charlotte! I'll tell Mr. George Godolphin, if I please. I am not the patient slave you helped to drive abroad: the trodden worm turns at last. Do you happen to know, sir, that Appleby's dead?"

"I don't know any thing about Appleby," replied George. "I remember the name as being the one owned by a gentleman who was subjected to some bad treatment in the shape of swindling, by one Rustin. But what had you or Verrall to do with it?"

"Pshaw!" said Rodolf Pain. "Verrall was Rustin."

George Godolphin opened his eyes to their utmost width. "N—o!" he uttered very slowly, certain curious ideas beginning to crowd into his mind. Certain remembrances also.

"He was,—Charlotte, I tell you it is of no use: I will speak. What does it matter, Mr. George Godolphin's knowing it? Verrall was the real principal,—Rustin, in fact; I the ostensible one. And I had to suffer."

"Did Appleby think you were Rustin!" inquired George, quite bewildered.

"Appleby, at one time, thought I was Verrall. Oh, I assure you there were wheels within wheels at work there. Of course there had to be, to carry such a concern as that on. There have still. Verrall, you know, could not be made the scapegoat; he takes care of that; besides, it would blow the whole thing to pieces, any evil falling upon him. It fell upon me, and I had to suffer for it, and abroad I went. I did not grumble; it would have been of no use; had I stayed at home and braved it out, I should have been sent abroad, I suppose, at her Majesty's cost——"

Charlotte interrupted in an awful passion. "Have you no sense of hu-

miliation, then, Rodolf Pain, that you tell these strange stories? Mr. George Godolphin, I pray you do not listen to him!"

"I am safe," replied George. "Pain can say what he pleases. It is safe with me."

"As to humiliation, that does not fall so much to my share as it does to another's, in the light I look at it. I was not the principal; I was only the scapegoat: principals rarely are made the scapegoats in that sort of business. Let it go, I say. I took the punishment without a word: but, now that the man's dead, and I can come home with safety, I want to know why I was not sent for."

"I don't believe the man is dead," observed Charlotte.

"I am as sure as sure can be, that he is," said Rodolf Pain. "I was told it from a sure and certain source, somebody who came out there, and who used to know Appleby. He said the death was in the *Times*, and he knew it for a fact besides."

"Appleby? Appleby?" mused George, his thoughts going back to a long-past morning, when he had been an unseen witness to Charlotte's interview with a gentleman giving that name,—which same gentleman had accosted him previously in the porch of Ashlydyat, mistaking it for the residence of Mr. Verrall. "I remember his coming down here once."

"I remember it too," said Rodolf Pain, significantly, "and the passion it put Verrall in. Verrall thought his address, down here, had oozed out through my carelessness. The trouble that we had with that Appleby, first and last! It went on for years. The bother was patched up at times, but only to break out again; and to send me into exile at last."

"Does Verrall know of his death?" inquired George.

"There's not a doubt that he must know of it," was the reply of Rodolf Pain. "And here's Charlotte says she won't ask Verrall, and won't tell him I am, here! He came home to-day."

Charlotte had resumed her walk underneath the archway: pacing there,—as was remarked before,—like a restrained tiger. She took no notice of Rodolf's last speech.

"Why not tell Verrall yourself that you are here?" was the sensible question of George.

"Well—you see, Mr. George Godolphin, I'd rather not, so long as there's the least doubt as to Appleby's death. I feel none myself: but if it should turn out to be a mistake, my appearance here would do good neither for me nor for Verrall. And Verrall's a dangerous man to cross. He might kill me in his passion. It takes a good deal to put him in one, but when it does come it's like a tornado."

"You acknowledge there is a doubt of Appleby's death, then!" sarcastically cried Charlotte.

"Well, I say that it's just possible. It was the not being fully certain that brought me back in this clandestine way. What I want you to do is to ask Verrall if Appleby's dead. I believe he will answer 'Yes.' 'Very well,' then you can say, 'Rodolf Pain's come home.' And if——"

"And if he says 'No, he is not dead,' what then?" fiercely interrupted Charlotte.

"Then you can tell me privately, and I must depart the way I came. But I don't depart without being *satisfied* of the fact," pointedly added Mr. Pain, as if he had not entire and implicit reliance upon Charlotte's word. "My firm belief is that he is dead, and that Verrall will tell you he is dead. In that case I am a free man to-morrow."

Charlotte turned her head towards him, terrible anger in her tone, in her face. "And how is your reappearance to be accounted for to those who look upon you as dead?"

"I don't care how," indifferently answered Rodolf. "I did not spread the report of my own death. If you did, you can contradict it."

"If I did do it, it was to save

your reputation," returned Charlotte, scarcely able to speak for passion.

"I know," said Rodolf Pain. "You feared something or other might come out about your husband, and so thought you'd kill me off-hand. Two for yourself and one for me, Charlotte."

She did not answer.

"If my coming back is so annoying to you, we can live apart," he resumed. "You pretty well gave me a sickener before I went. As you know."

"This must be an amusing dialogue to Mr. George Godolphin!" fumed Charlotte.

"May be," replied Rodolf Pain, his tone one of sad weariness. "I have been so hardly treated between you and Verrall, Charlotte, that I don't care who knows it."

"Where are you staying?" asked George, wondering whether the shady spots about Ashlydyat sheltered him in the day as well as in the night.

"Not far away, sir. At a roadside inn," was the answer. "Nobody knew me much, about here, in the old days: but, to make assurance doubly sure, I only come out in the evening. Look here, Charlotte. If you refuse to ask Verrall, or to help me, I shall go to London, and get the information there. I am not quite without friends in the great town: they'd receive me better than you have."

"I wonder you did not go there at once," snapped Charlotte.

"It was natural that I should go first where my wife was," returned Rodolf Pain. "Even though she had not been the most affectionate of wives to me."

Charlotte was certainly not showing herself particularly affectionate then, whether she had, or not, in the past days. Truth to say, whatever may have been her personal predilection or non-predilection for the gentleman, his return had set all her fears on the tremble. His personal safety was imperilled; and, with that, disgrace loomed in ominous attendance;

a disgrace which would be reflected upon Charlotte. Could she have sent Rodolf Pain flying on some impossible electric wires to the remotest region of the known and unknown globe, she would have done it then.

Leaving them to battle out their dispute alone, George Godolphin bent his steps to Lady Godolphin's Folly. Walking over the very Shadow, black as jet, treading in and out amid the dwarf bushes, which, when regarded from a distance, looked so like graves, he gained the Folly, and rang.

The servant admitted him to the drawing-room. It was empty as before. "Is Mr. Verrall not come in?" asked George.

"He is come in, sir. I thought he was here. I'll see for him."

George sat on alone. Presently the man came back. "My master has retired for the night, sir."

"What! Gone to bed?" cried George.

"Yes, sir."

"Did you tell him I had been here when he came in?"

"I told him you had been here, sir. In fact, I thought you were here still. I did not know you had left."

"Did Mr. Verrall tell you now that he could not see me?"

"He told me to say that he had retired for the night, sir."

"Is he in bed?" questioned George.

The servant hesitated. "He spoke to me through the door, sir. He did not open it."

George caught up his hat, the very movement of his hand showing displeasure. "Tell your master that I shall be here the first thing in the morning. I want to see him."

He passed out, a conviction upon his mind—though he could scarcely tell why it should have arisen—that Mr. Verrall had not retired for the night, but that he had gone up-stairs merely to avoid him. The thought angered him excessively. When he had gone some little distance beyond the terrace, he turned and looked at the upper windows of the house. There shone a light in Mr. Verrall's

chamber. "Not in bed, at any rate," thought George. He might have seen me if he would. I shall tell him——"

A touch upon George's arm. Some one had glided silently up. He turned and saw Charlotte.

"You will not betray the secret you have learnt to-night?" she passionately whispered.

"Is it likely?" he asked.

"He is only a fool, you know, at the best," was her next complimentary remark. "But fools give more trouble sometimes than sage people."

"You may depend upon me," was George's rejoinder. "Where is he?"

"Got rid of for the night," said Charlotte, in a terribly explosive tone. "Are you going in to see Verrall?"

"No. Verrall declines to see me. I am going home. Good-night."

"Declines to see you? He is tired, I suppose. Good-night, George."

George Godolphin walked away at a sober pace, reflecting on the events of the day,—of the evening. That he had been intensely surprised by the resuscitation of Rodolf Pain was indisputable; but George had too much heavy care upon him to cast after it more than a passing thought, now that the surprise was over. Rodolf Pain held a very small space in the estimation of George Godolphin. Charlotte had just said he was a fool; probably George shared in the opinion.

But, however much he felt inclined to dismiss the gentleman from his mind, he could not so readily dismiss a certain revelation made by him. That Rustin was Verrall. Whoever "Rustin" may have been, or what may have been his influence on the fortunes, good or ill, of Mr. George Godolphin, it boots not very closely to inquire. That George had had dealings with this "Rustin,"—dealings which did not bear for him any pleasant reminiscence,—and that George had never in his life got to see this Rustin, are facts sufficient for us to know. Rustin was one of those who had contrived to ease George of a good deal of superfluous money at odd times, leaving only trouble in its place. Many

a time had George prayed Verrall's good offices with his friend Rustin, to hold over this bill; to renew that acceptance. Verrall had never refused, and his sympathy with George and abuse of Rustin were great, when his mediation proved—as was sometimes the case—unsuccessful. To hear that this Rustin was Verrall himself, opened out a whole field of suggestive speculation to George. Not pleasant speculation, you may be sure.

He sat himself down, in his deep thought, on that same spot where Thomas Godolphin had sat, the evening of George's dinner-party,—the broken bench, near the turnstile. Should he weather the storm that was gathering so ominously above his head? Was that demand of Lord Averil's to-day the first rain-drop of the parting clouds? In sanguine moments,—and most moments are sanguine to men of the light temperament of George Godolphin,—he felt not a doubt that he should weather it. There are some men who systematically fling care and gloom from them. They cannot look trouble steadily in the face: they glance aside from it; they do not see it if it comes; they imbue it with the rosy hues of hope: but, look at it, they do not. Shallow and careless by nature, they cannot feel deep sorrow themselves, or be too conscious of any wrong they inflict on others. They may bring ruin upon the world, but they go on jauntily in their way. George had gone on in his way, in an easy, gentlemanly sort of manner, denying himself no gratification, and paying little heed to the day of reckoning that might come.

But on this night his mood was changed. Affairs generally were wearing to him an aspect of gloom: of gloom so preternaturally dark and hopeless, that his spirits were weighed down with it. For one thing, this doubt of Verrall irritated him. If the man had played him false, been holding the cards of a double game, why what an utter fool he, George, had been! How long he sat on that lonely seat he took no count: as long as his

brother had, that past night. The one had been ruminating on his forthcoming fate,—death; the other was lost in the anticipation of a worse fate,—disgrace and ruin. As he rose to pursue his way down the narrow and ghostly Ash-tree walk, a low cry burst from his lips, like the one which had been wrung from Thomas in his physical agony.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THOSE BONDS AGAIN!

A SHORT while elapsed. Summer weather began to show itself in Prior's Ash, and all things, so far as anybody saw or suspected, were going on as smooth as glass. Not a breath of wind had yet stirred up the dangerous current; not the faintest streak of black had come yet in the fair sky, to indicate that a storm might be gathering. One rumor, however, had gone forth, and Prior's Ash mourned sincerely, and trusted it was not true,—the state of health of Thomas Godolphin. He attacked with an incurable complaint, as his mother had been? Prior's Ash believed it not.

He had returned from his visit to town, with all his own suspicions confirmed. But the medical men had seemed to think that the fatal result might not overtake him yet, probably not for years. They enjoined tranquillity upon him, both of mind and body, and recommended him to leave the cares of business, so far as was practicable, to other people. Thomas smiled when he recited this piece of advice to George. "I had better retire upon my fortune," said he, jokingly.

"Do so," cried George, impulsively. "That is"—for a disagreeable consciousness came upon him, as he spoke, that Thomas's "fortune," if looked for, might be found more easy to talk of than to realize—"you can virtually retire, by remaining quietly

at Ashlydyat. Don't come down to the bank. I can manage quite well without you."

Thomas shook his head. "So long as I am at all capable, George, I shall not give up. I believe it is my duty not to do so. If what the doctors say be correct—that I may live on in my present state, or nearly in my present state, for years—you may be an older and a wiser man by the time you are left alone. When you shall have gained gray hair, George, and a stoop in the shoulders, Prior's Ash will be thinking you a stronger and a better man than I have ever been."

George made no reply. He knew which had been the best man, himself or his brother.

Every thing, I say, seemed to go on in its old routine. Thomas Godolphin came to business; not every day, but frequently. George gave his dinner-parties, and rode as much as ever with Charlotte Pain. What Charlotte had done with her husband, was her affair. He no longer disturbed the night stillness of the Dark Plain, or of Lady Godolphin's Folly; and not a suspicion, of his unwelcome revival from the dead, had transpired beyond George Godolphin. Charlotte casually said one day to George that Rodolf was in London. Perhaps he was.

Yes, gay as ever, in the day, was George Godolphin. If he had care, he kept it to himself, and nobody saw or suspected it. George was persuadable as a child; seeing little farther than his own nose; and Mr. Verrall had contrived to lull the suspicions, awakened by the words of Rodolf Pain. Mr. Verrall had not remained long at Lady Godolphin's Folly: he was soon away, and Charlotte had it to herself again, queen regnant. George had not forgotten to pay his evening visits there. There or elsewhere, he was out most evenings. And when he came in, he would go into the bank, and remain alone in the manager's room, often for hours.

One evening—it was the greatest wonder in the world—he had not

gone out. At eight o'clock he had gone into the bank and shut himself in. An hour afterwards, Maria knocked, and he admitted her.

George was at a large table. It was covered with account-books. Hard at work he appeared to be, making entries with his pen, by the light of his shaded lamp. "How busy you are, George!" she cried.

"Ay," said he, pleasantly. "Let nobody call me idle again."

"But why need you do it, George? You had not used to work at night."

"More work falls to my score, now. Thomas does not take his full share," observed George.

"Does it? I fancied neither you nor Thomas had much actual work to do. I thought you left it to the clerks. Isaac laughed at me one day, a long while ago, when I said something about your keeping the bank accounts. He asked me what I thought clerks were paid for."

"Never mind Isaac. What have you come in for? To tell me you are dull?—as you did last night."

"No. But I do get to feel very dull in an evening. You are scarcely ever with me now, George."

"Business must be attended to," responded George. "You should get some visitors in."

"They would not be you," was Maria's answer, simply spoken. "I came to tell you now that papa is here. Have you time to come and see him?"

George knitted his brow. The prospect of entertaining the Reverend Mr. Hastings, did not appear to have charms for him. Not that he allowed Maria to see the frown. She continued:

"Papa has been talking about the Chisholm property. The money is paid over, and he has brought it here for safety."

"Brought it to-night?" echoed George.

"Yes. He said it might be an unprofessional mode of doing business, but he supposed you would receive it," she added, laughing.

"How much is it?" cried George, —all too eagerly, but that Maria was unsuspecting.

"Nine—let me see—yes, I think he said nine thousand pounds."

George Godolphin closed the books before him, more than one of which was open, locked them up, put out the lamp, and accompanied his wife to the dining-room.

"Will you let me lodge some money here to-night?" asked Mr. Hastings, as he shook hands.

"As much as you like," replied George, laughing. "We can accommodate an unlimited amount."

The rector took out a large pocket-book, and counted down some bank-notes upon the table. "Brierly, the agent, brought it to me an hour ago," he observed, "and I had rather your bank had charge of it than my house. Nine thousand and forty-five pounds, Mr. George."

George counted the notes after Mr. Hastings. "I wonder Brierly did not give a check for it," he observed. "Did he bring the money over from Binham?"

"He came over in his gig. He said it had been paid to him in money, and he brought it just as it was paid. I'll trouble you for a receipt, Mr. George."

George carried the money away and came back with the receipt. "It must be placed to your account, I suppose, sir," he observed.

"Of course," answered Mr. Hastings. "You can't place it to the credit of the little Chisholms. It is the first time I ever was left trustee," he remarked, "and I hope it will be the last."

"Why so?" asked George.

"Why so? Because I like neither the trouble nor the responsibility. As soon as my co-trustee returns, the money is to be placed out on approved security: until then, you must take the charge of it. It is a poor sum, after all, compared with what was expected."

"Very poor," assented George. "Is it all that the property has realized?"

"Every shilling,—except the expenses. And lawyers, and agents, and auctioneers, take care that they shall never be slight," added Mr. Hastings, his lip curling with the cynical expression that was sometimes seen on it.

"It's their trade, sir."

"Ay. What a cutting up of property it is, this forced selling of an estate, through death!" he exclaimed. "Many a time has poor Chisholm said to me, in his last illness, 'There'll be hard upon twenty thousand to divide amongst them, when it's all sold.' And there is not ten!"

"I suppose every thing was sold?" said George.

"Every thing. House, land, ricks as they stood, farming stock, cattle, and furniture,—every thing, even to the plate and the books. The will so expressed it. I suppose Chisholm thought it best."

"Where are the children, papa?" asked Maria.

"The two girls are at school, the little boy is with his grandmother. I saw the girls last week when I was at Binham."

"The boy is to be a clergyman, is he not, papa?"

The rector answered the question in a tone of rebuke. "When he shall be of an age to choose, should he evince liking and fitness for the Church, then he is to be allowed to enter it,—not otherwise, Maria."

"How is the property left?" asked George.

"It is to be invested, and the interest devoted to the education and maintenance of the three, the boy being allowed a larger share of the interest than the girls. When the youngest, the boy, shall be of age, the principal is to be divided equally between them. Such are the terms of the will?"

"What is it to be invested in?"

"The funds, I suppose. It is left to the discretion of myself and Mr. Harknar. I shall let him decide: he is more a man of business than I am." So they talked on. When Mr.

Hastings, a short while before, had found himself left guardian and co-trustee to the children of a friend just deceased, his first impulse had been to decline the trust. Eventually he had accepted it. The other gentleman named, Mr. Harknar, had gone on business to one of the Ionian Islands, but he was now shortly expected home.

An hour the rector sat with them, talking of the orphan Chisholms, and of other matters. When he took his departure, George went again into the bank, and sat down to work at his books by the light of the shaded lamp. He was certainly more attentive to business by night than by day.

Once more—it was on the afternoon of the following day—Isaac Hastings entered the manager's room to announce a visitor to Mr. George Godolphin,—Lord Averil.

George looked up,—a startled expression crossing his face. It was instantly suppressed: but, not for his very life could he have helped its appearance in the first moment.

“When did he come to Prior's Ash?”

“I don't know,” replied Isaac. “I told him I was not sure but you were engaged, sir. I had thought Mr. Arkwright was with you. Lord Averil asked me to come and see: he particularly wishes to see you, he says.”

“I am engaged,” replied George, catching at the excuse like a drowning man catching at a straw. “That is”—taking out his watch—“I have not time now to see him. Tell Lord Averil I am particularly engaged.”

“Very well, sir.”

Isaac went out with the message, and Lord Averil departed, merely saying that he would call again. The reappearance of Charlotte Pain's husband could not have brought more dire dismay to that lady than did this reappearance of Lord Averil at Prior's Ash bring to George Godolphin.

Did he think Lord Averil would never favor Prior's Ash with his presence again? It is hard to say what foolish thing he thought. A man, drowning by water, does catch at

straws; and a man, drowning by evil fortune, catches at fantasies equally frail and hopeless. Lord Averil had been in town for the last month. Once, during that time, he had written to have those deposited deeds sent up to him, about which he had spoken to Mr. George Godolphin. George had answered the letter with some well-framed excuse. But now here was Lord Averil back at Prior's Ash—back at the bank! Doubtless, once more in quest of his deeds.

George Godolphin put his hand to his weary brow. His ever-constant belief was, that he should get straight in time. In time. To his sanguine temperament, time would prove the panacea for all his ills. If he could only stave off present difficulties, time would do the rest. That terrible difficulties were upon him, none knew better than he: but the worst difficulty of all would be this of Lord Averil's, should exposure come. Short as George was of ready cash,—it may seem a paradox to say it of a banker, but so it was,—he would have scraped together every shilling from every available corner, and parted with it, to have insured the absence of Lord Averil from Prior's Ash for an indefinite period.

He pressed his hand upon his weary brow, his brain, within, working tumultuously. If he must see Lord Averil,—and there could be no escape,—what should be his plea for the non-production of those deeds? It must be a plausible one. His thoughts were interrupted by a rap at the door.

“Come in,” cried George, in a sadly hopeless tone. Was it Lord Averil back again?

It was only a note,—a three-cornered miniature thing, fastened by a silver wafer. No business-communication, that. George knew the writing well.

“DEAR MR. GEORGE:—Will you ride with me to-day at half-past three, instead of four? I'll tell you my reason then. Lord A. is back.

“Yours,
“C. P.”

George tore the note into fragments and flung them into the paper-basket. It was ten minutes past three then. Glad of any excuse to be out of business and its cares, he hastened things away in his room, and left it. There were moments when George was tempted heartily to wish himself out of it for good, safe in some unapproachable island, too remote from civilization to be visited by the world. But he did not see his way clear to get there.

Look at him as he rides through the town, Charlotte by his side, and the two grooms behind! Look at his fine bay-horse, his gentlemanly figure!—look at his laughing blue eyes, his wavy, golden hair, at the gay smile on his lips as he turns to Charlotte! Can you fancy *care* an inmate of that man's breast? Prior's Ash did not. They were only content to admire and envy their handsome and most attractive banker, George Godolphin.

They rode by the bank. It was not often—indeed it was very rare—that they passed it in their rides. There were plenty of other ways, without choosing that. George never would have chosen it: perhaps he had the grace to think that his frequent rides with Mrs. Charlotte Pain need not be paraded so conspicuously before the windows of his wife. Charlotte, however, had a will of her own, and sometimes chose to exercise it.

As good luck had it, or ill-luck, or no luck at all, Maria happened to be at the drawing-room window to-day. Some ladies were paying her a visit, and Meta—who sometimes got indulged as an only child does get indulged—made one in the drawing-room. She caught sight of her papa, forthwith climbed upon a chair to see him better, and leaned from the open window, clapping her hands. "Papa! papa!"

Maria sprang to her to hold her in. She was a child who had little sense of danger. Had George held out his arms then, and said, "Jump out to me, Meta," she would have taken the leap fearlessly. Maria caught her round

the waist, and the visitors came forward to see.

Charlotte threw up a triumphant glance. One of those curiously triumphant glances that she was rather fond of giving Mrs. George Godolphin. Maria bowed gravely. An idea—a faint idea, glancing at no ill—had been growing over her lately that her husband passed more time with Charlotte Pain than was absolutely necessary. George smiled at his wife, lifted his hat to the ladies by her side, and waved a kiss to Meta.

The red blood had mantled in his cheek. At what? At Charlotte's triumphantly saucy look,—which he had not failed to catch,—or at his wife's grave one? Or at the sight of a gentleman who stood on the pavement, saluting them as they passed? It was the Viscount Averil. George saluted again, and rode on with a smooth brow and a face bright as day.

Considerably later; just before five, in fact, when the bank closed, Lord Averil presented himself at it again. Had Mr. George Godolphin returned? If so, could he see him?

Mr. George had not come in. Mr. Hurde came forward and inquired if it was any thing that he could do for his lordship.

Lord Averil had known Mr. Hurde a long while. He had seen him in his place there as long as he had banked with Godolphin, Crosse, and Godolphin. He supposed he was a confidential clerk: and, in point of fact, Mr. Hurde was so to a great extent.

"You hold some bonds of mine," said Lord Averil. "Bonds of some stock which Sir George Godolphin purchased for me. Did you know any thing of it?"

"I remember the transaction quite well, my lord," replied Mr. Hurde.

"I want the bonds delivered up to me. Can I have them?"

"Certainly. Your lordship can have them whenever you please. They are in your case, in the strong-room."

"I should have liked them to-day, if possible," replied Lord Averil.

"There will be no difficulty at all, my lord. Mr. George Godolphin can deliver them to you as soon as he comes in."

"Will he be in soon, think you?"

"He is sure not to be very long, my lord. I have to see him before I leave."

"Then I think I'll wait," said Lord Averil.

He was shown into the bank-parlor, and left there. At five the clerks quitted the bank: it was usual for them to do so. Mr. Hurde waited. In about a quarter of an hour George came in.

A few minutes given to the business for which Mr. Hurde had remained, and then he spoke. "Lord Averil is waiting to see you, sir."

"Lord Averil?" cried George, in a hasty tone. "Waiting now?"

"He is in the parlor, sir. He asked if he could have his bonds given up to him. I said I thought he could, and he replied that he would wait."

"Then you had no business to say any thing of the sort," burst forth George, in so vehement a tone as to astonish the sober cashier. "It may not be convenient to lay one's hands upon the bonds at a minute's notice, Hurde," he more quietly added, as if he would soothe down or atone for his anger.

"They are in Lord Averil's box in the strong-room, sir," said the old clerk, supposing his master must have temporarily forgotten where the said bonds were placed. "Mr. Godolphin was speaking to me about those bonds the other day."

"What about them?" inquired George, striving to put the question easily.

"It was nothing particular, sir. He was only mentioning their increased value: how they had gone up in the market."

George said no more. He turned from the office and halted before the door of the parlor. Halted to collect his brains. One hand was on the handle of the door, the other on his

brow. Lord Averil rose, and shook hands cordially.

"I am come to bother you again about my bonds, Mr. George. I don't care to keep that stock, and the present is a most favorable opportunity to sell."

"They'll go higher yet," observed George.

"Will they? They tell me different in London. The opinion there, is, that they will begin to fall."

"All rubbish," said George. "A canard got up on the Stock Exchange."

"Well, I have made up my mind to sell," observed Lord Averil. "I wrote to you from London to send me the shares up; but you did not seem to be in a hurry to do it. So I have come down for them."

George laughed. "Come down for nothing but the shares? But you will make a stay?"

"No. I go up again to-morrow. I am not sure whether I shall return here for the summer or not. Some friends of mine are going over to Canada for three or four months. Perhaps I may accompany them."

George devoutly wished his lordship could be off, there and then; and that the sojourn might last years, instead of months. "I wish I had the time to go there!" cried he, aloud: "I'd start to-morrow."

"Will it be troubling you to give me the bonds, Mr. George?"

George sat a few moments, his head bent as if in thought. "The bonds?" he slowly cried. "Your bonds? They were sent—yes, certainly, your bonds were sent to our agents in London."

"My bonds sent to your agents in London!" repeated Lord Averil, in surprise. "What for?"

George coughed. "Some of our deposited deeds are kept there. Let me see?" he continued, again plunging into thought. "Yes,—yours were amongst those that went up. I remember."

"But why not have told me this before?" asked Lord Averil. "Had

you written me word, it would have saved me the journey down."

"To be sure," acquiesced George. "To tell you the truth, I never thought much about it, or where they were, until now."

"Mr. Hurde told me they were here," said Lord Averil.

"No doubt he thought so. They were here, until recently."

"I shall have my journey back again, then!" cried his lordship. "Will the town-bankers give them up to me on my simple demand, or must they have your authority?"

"I will write to them," responded George.

The viscount rose. Not a shade of suspicion had crossed his mind. But he could not help thinking that he should have made a better man of business than handsome George. "I wish you had told me!" he involuntarily repeated. "But I suppose," he good-naturedly added, "that my poor bonds are too insignificant to have much place in the thoughts of a man surrounded by hundreds of thousands."

George laughed. He was walking with Lord Averil to the entrance-door. They stood at it together when it was reached, the street before them. Lord Averil asked after Mr. Godolphin.

"He seems a little better," replied George. "Certainly no worse."

"I am glad to hear it,—very glad indeed. You will not forget to write to town, Mr. George."

"All right," replied George Godolphin.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"I SEE IT: BUT I CANNOT EXPLAIN IT."

THE red light of the setting sun streamed upon the golden hair of Cecil Godolphin. She had strolled out from the dining-room to enjoy the beauty of the late spring evening, or to indulge her own thoughts, as

might be. To the confines of the grounds strayed she, as far as those surrounding Lady Godolphin's Folly; and there she sat down on the garden-bench.

Not to remain alone for long. She was interrupted by the very man upon whom—if the disclosure must be made—her evening thoughts had centred. He was coming up with a quick step on the road from Prior's Ash. Seeing Cecil, he turned off to accost her, his heart beating.

Beating with the slight hill, or with the sight of Cecil? He best knew. Many a man's heart has beaten at a less lovely vision. She wore her favorite attire, white, set off with blue ribbons, and her golden hair glittered in the sunlight. She nearly screamed with surprise. She had been thinking of him, it is true, but as one who was miles and miles away. In spite of his stormy and not long-past rejection, Lord Averil went straight up to her and held out his hand. Did he notice that her blue eyes dropped beneath his, as she rose to answer his greeting,—that the soft color on her cheeks changed to a hot damask?

"I fear I have surprised you," said Lord Averil.

"A little," acknowledged Cecil. "I did not know you were at Prior's Ash. Thomas will be glad to see you."

She turned to walk with him to the house, as in courtesy bound. Lord Averil offered her his arm, and Cecil condescended to put the tips of her fingers within it. Neither broke the silence; perhaps neither could; and they gained the large porch of Ashlydyat. Cecil spoke then.

"Are you going to make a long stay in the country?"

"A very short one. A party of friends are departing for Canada, and they wish me to make one. I think I shall."

"To Canada!" echoed Cecil,—
"all that way!"

Lord Averil smiled. "It sounds farther than it really is. I am an old traveler, you know."

Cecil opened the dining-room door. Thomas was alone. He had left the table, and was seated in his arm-chair at the window. A glad smile illumined his face when he saw Lord Averil. Lord Averil was one of the very few of whom Thomas Godolphin could have made a close friend. These close friends!—not above one or two, perhaps, can we meet with in a lifetime. Acquaintances many; but friends—those to whom the heart can speak out its inmost thoughts, who may be as our own soul—how few!

Cecil left them alone. She ran off to tell Janet that Lord Averil had come, and would perhaps take tea with them, were he invited. Thomas, with ideas more largely hospitable, was pressing dinner upon him. It could be brought back at once.

"I have dined at the Bell," replied Lord Averil. "Not any, thank you," he added, as Thomas was turning to the wine. "I have taken all I require."

"Have you come to make a long stay?" inquired Thomas,—like Cecil had done.

"I shall go back to town to-morrow. Having nothing to do with myself this evening, I thought I could not spend it better than in coming to you. I am pleased to see that you are looking better."

"The warm weather seems to be doing me good," was Thomas Godolphin's reply,—a consciousness within him how little better he really was. "Why are you making so short a stay?"

"Well, as it turns out, my journey has been a superfluous one. Those bonds that you hold of mine brought me down," continued Lord Averil, little thinking that he was doing mischief by mentioning the subject to Mr. Godolphin. "I am going to sell out, and came down to get them."

"Why did you not write?" said Thomas. "We could have sent them to you."

"I did write, a week or ten days ago, and your brother wrote me word in answer that the bonds should be

sent,—or something to that effect. But they never came. Having nothing much to do, I thought I would run down for them. I also wanted to see Max. But he is away."

"I believe he is," replied Thomas. "Have you got the bonds?"

"It has proved a useless journey, I say," replied Lord Averil. "The bonds, I find, are in town, at your agents."

Thomas Godolphin looked up with surprise. "They are not in town," he said. "What should bring them in town? Who told you that?"

"Your brother George."

"George told you the bonds were in town?" repeated Thomas, as if he could not believe his ears.

"He did indeed; not three hours ago. Why? Are they not in town?"

"Most certainly not. The bonds are in our strong-room, where they were first deposited. They have never been moved from it. What could George have been thinking of?"

"To tell you the truth," I did not fancy he appeared over certain himself, where they were, whether here or in town," said Lord Averil. "At length he remembered that they were in town: he said they had gone up with other deeds."

"He makes a mistake," said Thomas. "He must be confounding your bonds with some that we sent up the other day of Lord Cavemore's. And yet, I wonder that he should! Lord Cavemore's went up for a particular purpose, and George himself took the instructions. Lord Cavemore consulted him upon the business altogether."

"Then—if my bonds are here—can I have them at once?" asked Lord Averil.

"You can have them the instant the bank is open to-morrow morning. In fact, you might have them to-night if George should happen to be at home. I am sorry you should have had any trouble about it."

Lord Averil smiled. "Speaking frankly, I do not fancy George is so much a man of business as you are. When I first asked for the bonds, nearly

a month ago, he appeared to be quite at sea; not to know what I meant, or to remember that you held bonds of mine."

"Did you ask for the bonds a month ago?" exclaimed Thomas.

"It's about that time. It was when you were in London. George at last remembered."

"Did he not give them to you?"

"No. He said,—I almost forget what he said. That he did not know where to put his hands upon them, I think, in your absence."

Thomas felt vexed. He wondered what could have possessed George to behave so unbusiness-like: or how it was possible for him to have blundered so about the bonds. But he would not blame his brother to Lord Averil. "You shall have the bonds the first thing in the morning," he said. "I will drop a note to George, reminding him where they are, in case I am not at the bank early enough for you."

Unusually well felt Thomas Godolphin that evening. He proceeded with Lord Averil to the drawing-room, to his sisters; and a very pleasant hour or two they all spent together. Bessy laughed at Lord Averil a great deal about his proposed Canada expedition, telling him she did not believe he was serious in saying that he entertained it.

It was a genial night, soft, warm, and lovely, the moon bright again. The church-clocks at Prior's Ash were striking ten when Lord Averil rose to leave Ashlydyat. "If you will wait two minutes for me, I will go a little way with you," said Thomas Godolphin.

He withdrew to another room, penned a line, and dispatched it by a servant to the bank. Then he rejoined Lord Averil, passed his arm within his lordship's, and went out with him.

"Is this Canada project a joke?" asked he.

"Indeed, no. I have not quite made up my mind to go. I think I shall. If so, I shall be away in a week from this. Why should I not

go? I have no settled home, no ties."

"Should you not—I beg your pardon, Averil—be the happier for a settled home? You might form ties. I think a roving life must be the least desirable one."

"It is one I was never fitted for. My inclination would lead me to home, to domestic happiness. But, as you know, I put that out of my power."

"For a time. But that is over. You might marry again."

"I do not suppose I ever shall," returned Lord Averil, feeling half prompted to tell his unsuspecting friend that his own sister was the barrier. "You have never married," he resumed, allowing the impulse to die away.

Thomas Godolphin shook his head. "The cases are different," he said. "In your wife you lost one whom you could not regret——"

"Don't call her by that name, Godolphin!" burst forth Lord Averil.

"And in Ethel I lost one who was all the world to me,—who could never be replaced," Thomas went on, after a pause. "The cases were widely different."

"Ay, widely different," assented Lord Averil.

They walked on in silence, each buried in his own thoughts. At the commencement of the road, Lord Averil stopped, and took Thomas Godolphin's hand in his.

"You shall not come any farther with me."

Thomas stopped also. He had not intended to go farther. "You will really start for Canada?"

"I believe I shall."

"Take my blessing with you then, Averil. We may never meet again in this world."

"What!" exclaimed Lord Averil.

"The medical men entertain hopes that my life may not be terminated so speedily: I believe that a few months will end it. I may not live to welcome you home."

It was the first intimation Lord

Averil had received of Thomas Godolphin's fatal malady. Thomas explained it to him. He was overwhelmed.

"Oh, my friend! my friend! Cannot death be coaxed to spare you?" he called out, in his pain. How many have vainly echoed the same cry!

A few more words, a long grasp of the lingering hands, and they parted. Thomas with a God-speed; Lord Averil with a different prayer—a God *save*—upon his lips. The peer turned to Prior's Ash; Thomas Godolphin towards home.

Not by the path he had come. He had brought Lord Averil down to the broad open entrance to Ashlydyat; he turned to go round the path by the ash-trees in front of the Dark Plain. Possibly he had a mind to see whether the Shadow was abroad to-night.

Before he had well turned the corner of the trees, or had given more than a glance to the Black Shadow—for there it was—he heard hasty footsteps behind him. Looking round, he beheld Lord Averil. Softened by the parting, by the tidings he had heard, an impulse had taken Lord Averil that he would speak of Cecil: and he turned back to do so.

"Godolphin, I—— What's that?"

The great Black Shadow, stretching out there in the distance, had attracted the attention of Lord Averil. He stood with his forefinger extended, pointing towards it.

"That is what they call the Shadow of Ashlydyat," quietly replied Thomas Godolphin.

Lord Averil had never before seen it. He had heard enough of it. Attentively regarding it, he did not for some time speak.

"Do you believe in it?" he asked, at length.

"Believe in it?" repeated Thomas Godolphin. "I believe that a dark Shadow does appear there on occasions. I cannot believe otherwise, with that ocular demonstration before me."

"And how do you account for it?" asked Lord Averil.

"I have been all my life trying to do so. And have come to the conclusion that there is no accounting for it."

"But I have always treated the report as the most perfect folly," rejoined Lord Averil.

"Ay No doubt. As I should do, but for *that*,"—and Thomas Godolphin nodded towards the Shadow, on which the peer's eyes were fixed with an intense stare. "You and I are rational beings, Averil, not likely to be led away by superstitious folly; we live in an enlightened age, little tolerant of such. And yet, here we stand, gazing with dispassionate eyes on that Shadow, in full possession of our sober judgment. It is there; we see it: and that is all we can tell about it. The Shadow of Ashlydyat is ridiculed from one end of the county to the other; spoken of—when spoken of at all—as an absurd superstition of the Godolphins. But there the Shadow is: and not all the ridicule extant can do away with the plain fact. I see it: but I cannot explain it?"

"What do you do about it?"

Lord Averil asked the question in his bewildered wonder. A smile crossed Thomas Godolphin's lips as he answered it.

"We do nothing. We can do nothing. We cannot prevent its coming; we cannot send it away when it comes; we cannot bring it if it does not come of its own accord. If I reasoned about it for a month, Averil, I could give no better explanation."

Lord Averil drew a deep breath, like one awaking from a reverie. As Thomas Godolphin said: *there was the Shadow*, all plain to his eyes, to his senses: but of explanation of its cause, there was none: The little episode had driven away the impulse to speak of Cecil: and, after another hand pressure, he finally turned away, and pursued his walk to Prior's Ash.

Another was also pursuing his

walk to Prior's Ash; indeed, had nearly gained it; and that was Thomas Godolphin's messenger. Approaching the bank residence, he distinguished some one standing at the entrance, and found that it was Mr. George Godolphin.

"What's this?" asked George. "A letter?"

"My master sent me down with it, sir."

George turned it about in his hand. "Does it require an answer, do you know, Andrew?"

"No, sir. My master said I need not wait."

The man departed, and George carried the note into the dining-room. Maria sat there, reading, underneath the chandelier. She looked pleased to see her husband, and closed the book. George had been out all the evening. He stood opposite Maria, and tore the note open.

"DEAR GEORGE:—Lord Averil's bonds are in his case in the strong-room. How could you make such a mistake as to tell him they had gone to town? I send you word, lest he should call for them in the morning before I reach the bank.

"Ever yours,

"THOMAS GODOLPHIN."

Then the explosion must come! With a word, that was very like a groan, George crushed the paper in his hand. Maria heard the sound.

"What is it, George?"

"Nothing. What? This? Only a note from Thomas."

He began whistling lightly, to cover his real feelings, and took up the book Maria had closed. "Is it entertaining?" asked he, turning over its pages.

"Very. It's a nice book. But for having it to read, I should have been lying on the sofa. I have a very bad headache to-night."

"Go to bed," responded George.

"I think I must. Perhaps you will not like to come so early?"

"Never mind me. I have got an

hour or two's work to do in the bank to-night."

"Oh, George!"

"My dear, it need not keep you up."

"George, I cannot *think* how it is that you have night-work to do!" she impulsively exclaimed, after a pause. "I am sure Thomas would not wish you to do it. I think I shall ask him."

George turned round, and grasped her shoulder, quite sharply. "Maria."

His grasp, I say, was sharp, his look and voice were imperatively stern. Maria felt frightened: she scarcely knew why. "What have I done, George?" she asked, timidly.

"Understand me, please, once for all. What I choose to do, does not regard my brother Thomas. I will have no tales carried to him."

"Why do you mistake me so?" she answered, when she had a little recovered her surprise. "It cannot be well for you, or pleasant for you, to have so much work to do at night, and I thought Thomas would have told you not to do it. Tales! George, you know I should never tell them of you."

"No, no; I know you would not, Maria. I have been idle of late, and am getting up my work: that's all: but it would not do to let Thomas know it. You—you don't tell Isaac that I sit up at the books?" he cried, almost in an accent of terror.

She looked up at him wonderingly, through her wet eyelashes. "Surely, no! Should I be likely to speak to Isaac of what you do? or to any one?"

George folded her in his arms, kissing the tears from her face. "Go to bed at once, darling, and sleep your headache off," he fondly whispered. "I will be up soon; as soon as I can."

He lighted her candle and gave it to her. As Maria took it, she remembered something she wished to say to him. "When will it be convenient to you to give me some money, George?"

"What for?"

“Oh, you know. For housekeeping. The bills are getting so heavy, and the tradespeople are beginning to ask for their money. The servants want their wages, too. Would it not be better to pay regularly, as we used to do, instead of letting things run on so long?”

“Ay. I’ll see about it,” replied George.

George had got into the habit of giving the same answer, when asked by his wife for money. She had asked several times lately: but all the satisfaction she could get was, “I’ll see about it.” Not a suspicion that his means were running short ever crossed her brain.

She went up-stairs and retired to rest, soon falling asleep. Her head was heavy. The household went to bed; George shut himself in the bank,—as was his recent custom; and the house was soon wrapped in quiet,—like a sober house should be.

Two o’clock was striking from All Souls’ clock when Maria awoke. Why should she have awoke?—there was no noise to startle her. All she knew—and it is all that a great many of us know—was, that she did awake.

To her exceeding astonishment, George was not in bed. Two o’clock!—and he had said that he should soon follow her! A feeling of vague alarm stole over Maria.

All sorts of improbable suggestions crowded on her imagination. Imaginations, you know, are more fantastic in the dark, still night, than in the busy day. Had he been taken ill? Had he fallen asleep at his work? Could he,—could he have set the books and himself on fire? Had a golden crown been offered to Maria, she could not have remained there tranquil a minute longer.

Groping about for her shoes and stockings she put them on, flung over herself a large, warm dressing-gown, and stole down the stairs. Passing through the door that divided the dwelling from the bank, she softly turned the handle of George’s room,

and opened it. Secure in the house being at rest, he had not locked the doors against interruption.

The tables seemed strewn with books, but George was not then occupied with them. He was sitting in a chair apart, buried—as it appeared—in thought, his hands and his head alike hanging listlessly down. He started up at the entrance of Maria.

“I got alarmed, George,” she said, trying to explain her appearance. “I awoke suddenly, and finding you had not come up, I grew frightened, thinking you might be ill. It is two o’clock!”

“Whatever made you come down out of your warm bed?” reiterated George. “You’ll catch your death.”

“I got frightened, I say. Will you not come up now?”

“I am coming directly,” replied George. “Go back at once. You’ll be sure to take cold.”

Maria turned to obey. Somehow the dark passages struck on her with a nervous dread. She shrunk into the room again.

“I don’t care to go up alone,” she cried. “I have no light.”

“How foolish!” he exclaimed. “I declare, Maria, Meta would be braver!”

Some nervous feeling did certainly appear to be upon her, for she burst into tears. George’s tone,—a tone of irritation, it had been,—was exchanged for one of soothing tenderness, as he bent over her. “What ails you to-night, Maria? I’ll light you up.”

“I don’t know what ails me,” she answered, suppressing her sobs. “I have not felt in spirits of late. George, sometimes I think you are not well. You are a great deal changed in your manner to me. Have I,—have I displeased you in any way?”

“You displeased me! No, my darling.”

He spoke with impulsive fondness. Well had it been for George Godolphin had no heavier care been upon him than any little displeasure his wife could give. The thought occurred to him with strange bitterness.

"I'll light you up, Maria," he repeated. "I shall not be long after you."

And, taking the heavy lamp from the table, he carried it to the outer passage, and held it while she went up the stairs. Then he returned to the room and to his work,—whatever that work might be.

Vain work! vain, delusive, useless work! As you will soon find, Mr. George Godolphin.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE LOSS PROCLAIMED.

WHETHER carking care or hopeful joy may be in the heart's inner dwelling-place, people generally meet at their breakfast-tables as usual. So long as there's any thing in the house to eat, meals are spread: so long as the customary laws of daily routine can be observed, they are observed; or, at any rate, a pretence to it is made.

George Godolphin sat with his wife at the breakfast-table. Maria was in high spirits: her indisposition of the previous evening had passed away. She was telling George an anecdote of Meta, as she poured out the coffee, some little *ruse* the young lady had exercised, to come over Margery; and Maria laughed heartily as she told it. George laughed in echo; full as merrily his wife. There must have been two George Godolphins surely at that moment! The outer one, the one presented to the world, all gay, and smiling, and careless; the inner one, kept for his own private and especial delectation, grim, and dark, and ghastly.

Breakfast was nearly over, when there was heard a clattering of little feet, the door was burst open, and Miss Meta appeared in a triumphant shout of laughter. She had eluded Margery's vigilance, and eloped from

the nursery. Margery speedily followed, scolding loudly, her hands stretched forth to seize upon the runaway. But Meta had bounded to her papa, and found a refuge.

George caught her up on his knee: his bright hair—the same shade once, but darker now—mixing with the golden locks of the child, as he took from her kiss after kiss. To say that George Godolphin was passionately fond of his child would not be speaking too strongly: few fathers can love a child more ardently than George did Meta. A pretty little lovable thing she was! Look at her on George's knee! her dainty white frock, its sleeves tied up with blue, her pretty socks and shoes, her sunny face, surrounded by its golden shower of shining curls. Margery scolded in the doorway, but Miss Meta, little heeding, was casting her inquisitive eyes on the breakfast-table, to see what there might be nice upon it.

"If you'd just please to punish her once for it, sir, she'd not do it, maybe, in future!" grumbled Margery. "Naughty girl!"

"I think I must," said George. "Shall I whip you, Meta?"

Meta shouted out a joyous little laugh in answer, turned her face round, and clung to him lovingly. She knew what his "whippings" meant.

"But if Margery says so?"

"Margery nobody," responded Meta, bustling her face round to the table again. "Mamma, let me have a bit of that."

Maria hesitated. "That" was some tempting-looking breakfast-dish, very good, no doubt, for George, but very rich for Meta. George, however, drew it towards him, and cut her some, claiming for his reward as many kisses as Meta's impatience to begin upon it would accord. Margery went off in a flounce.

"No wonder the child despises her bread-and-milk in a morning! If I had been let feed *you* upon them spiced things, Mr. George, when you

were a child, I wonder whether you'd have grown into the strong man you have!"

"Into a stronger," called out George. He liked as much to give a word of teasing now and then to Margery as he had in the old days she referred to. Margery retorted with some answer, which he did not catch, and George laughed,—laughed out loud and merrily, and again buried his face on Meta's.

But he could not stay all day long in that scene of peace. Oh, if we only could! those who have to go out to battle with the daily world. If there were but a means of shutting and locking the door on the woes that turn a man's hair white before its time!

George took Meta a triumphal ride round the room on his shoulder, and then, having extorted his payment, put her down by Maria. Going into the bank to his day's work. His day's work! rather an embarrassing one, that day, Mr. George Godolphin!

Taking the keys of the strong-room from the cupboard, also certain other keys, as he had done once before with- in the knowledge of the reader, he proceeded to the strong-room, opened a certain safe in it, and took out the box inscribed "Lord Averil." This he also opened, and examined its contents. Mr. George Godolphin was searching for certain bonds: or, making believe to search for them. Having satisfied himself that they were not there, he returned the box to its place, made all safe again, went back, and sat down to open the morning letters. Presently he called to a clerk.

"Is Mr. Hurde come?"

"Yes, sir."

"Desire him to step here."

The old clerk came in, in obedience to the summons, taking off his spectacles as he entered, to rub one of their glasses, which had got misty. George leaned his elbow on the table, and, resting his chin upon his hand, looked him full in the face.

"Hurde," said he, plunging mid-

way into his communication, which he made in a low tone, "those bonds of Lord Averil's are missing."

The clerk paused, as if scarcely understanding. "How do you mean, sir? Missing in what way?"

"I can't find them," replied George.

"They are in Lord Averil's box in the strong-room, sir, with his other papers."

"But they are not there," replied George. "I have searched the papers through this morning. Hurde, we have had some roguery at work."

Another pause, devoted by Mr. Hurde to the revolving of the communication. "Roguary!" he slowly repeated. "Have you missed any thing else, Mr. George?"

"No. I have not looked."

"Oh, sir, there's no fear of there being any thing wrong," resumed the old clerk, his good sense repudiating the notion. "Mr. Godolphin must have moved them."

"That's just what I thought until last night," said George. "The fact is, Lord Averil asked me for these bonds some little while ago, while my brother was in London. I opened the box, and, not seeing them there, came to the conclusion that Mr. Godolphin had moved them. Lord Averil said it was of no consequence then, and departed for London: and the thing slipped from my memory. When you spoke to me about it last evening, of course I felt vexed to have forgotten it, and I put off Lord Averil with the best excuse I could."

"And has Mr. Godolphin not moved them, sir?" demanded the clerk.

"It appears not. He dropped me a line last night, saying I should find the bonds in their place in the box. I suppose Lord Averil was up at Ashlydyat and mentioned it. But I can't find them in the box."

"Sir, you know you are not a very good searcher," observed Mr. Hurde, after some consideration. "Once or twice that you have searched for deeds, Mr. Godolphin has found them afterwards, overlooked by you. Shall

I go carefully over the box, sir? I think they must be in it."

"I tell you, Hurde, they are not."

He spoke somewhat fractiously. Fully aware that he had occasionally overlooked deeds, in his haste or carelessness, perhaps the contrast between those times and these, imparted a sting to his manner. *Then*, whether the deeds had been found or not, he was innocent; now—

"But, if they are not in the box, where can they be?" resumed Mr. Hurde.

"There it is," said George. "Where can they be? I say, Hurde, that some light fingers must have been at work."

Mr. Hurde considered the point over in his mind. It seemed that he could not adopt the conclusion readily. "I should think not, sir. If nothing else is missing, I should say for certain not."

"*They* are missing for certain," returned George. "It will put Mr. Godolphin out terribly. I wish there had been any means of keeping it from him: but, now that Lord Averil has mentioned the bonds to him, there are none. I shall get the blame. He will think I have not kept the keys securely."

"But you have, sir, have you not?"

"For all I know I have," replied George, assuming a carelessness as to the point, of which he had not been guilty. "Allowing that I had not, for argument's sake, what dishonest person can we have about us, Hurde, who would use the advantage to his own profit?"

Mr. Hurde began calling over the list of clerks preparatory to considering whether a hole could be discerned in any of their coats. He was engaged in this mental process, when a clerk interrupted them, to say that a gentleman was asking to see Mr. George Godolphin.

George looked up sharply. The applicant, however, was not Lord Averil, and anybody else would be more tolerable to him on that day than his lordship; Mr. Godolphin,

perhaps, excepted. As the old clerk was withdrawing to give place to the visitor, George caught sight, through the open door, of Mr. Godolphin entering the office. An impulse to throw the disclosure off his own shoulders, prompted him to hasten after Mr. Hurde.

"Hurde," he whispered, catching his arm, "you may as well make the communication to Mr. Godolphin. He ought to know it at once, and I may be engaged some time."

So George remained shut up, and the old clerk followed Thomas Godolphin to his private room. Mr. Godolphin felt well that morning, and had come unusually early: possibly lest there should be any further blundering over Lord Averil's bonds. He looked somewhat surprised to see the old clerk approaching him with a long face and mysterious look.

"Do you want me, Hurde?"

"Mr. George has desired me to speak to you, sir, about those bonds of Lord Averil's. To make an unpleasant communication, in fact. He is engaged himself just now. He says he can't find them."

"They are in the strong-room, in Lord Averil's case," replied Mr. Godolphin.

"He says they are not there, sir,—that he can't find them."

"But they are there," returned Thomas. "They have not been moved out of the box since they were first placed in it."

He spoke quietly as he ever did, but very firmly, almost as if he were disputing the point, or had been prepared to dispute it. Mr. Hurde resumed after some deliberation: he was a deliberate man always, both in temperament and speech.

"What Mr. George says, is this, sir. That when you were in London, Lord Averil asked for his bonds. Mr. George looked for them, and found they were not in the box: and he came to the conclusion that you had moved them. The affair escaped his memory, he says, until last night, when he was asked for them again.

He has been searching the box this morning, but cannot find the bonds in it."

"They must be there," observed Thomas Godolphin. "If George has not moved them, I have not. He has a knack of overlooking things."

"I said so to him, sir, just now. He——"

"Do you say he is engaged?" interrupted Thomas Godolphin.

"The secretary of the railway company is with him, sir. I suppose he has come about that loan. I think the bonds can't be anywhere but in the box, sir. I told Mr. George so."

"Let me know when he is disengaged," said Thomas Godolphin. And Mr. Hurde went out.

George Godolphin was disengaged then. Mr. Hurde saw the gentleman whom he had called the railway company's secretary, departing. The next minute George Godolphin came out of his room.

"Have you mentioned that to my brother?" he asked of Hurde.

"I have, sir. Mr. Godolphin thinks that you must be mistaken."

George went in to his brother, shook hands, and said he was glad to see him so early. "It is a strange thing about these bonds," he continued, not giving Thomas time to speak.

"You have overlooked them," said Thomas. "Bring me the keys, and I will go and get them."

"I assure you they are not there."

"They must be there, George. Bring me the keys."

George Godolphin produced the key of the strong-room and of the safe, and Lord Averil's box was examined by Thomas Godolphin. The bonds in question were *not* in it; and Thomas, had he missed himself, could scarcely have been more completely astonished.

"George, you must have moved them," were the first words he spoke.

"Not I," said George, lightly.

"Where should I move them to?"

"But no one has the power to get into that room, and penetrate to the safe and the box after it, except you

and myself," urged Mr. Godolphin. "Unless, indeed, you have allowed the keys to stray."

"I have not done that," answered George. "This seems to be perfectly unaccountable."

"How came you to tell Averil last night that the bonds had gone to London?"

"Well, the fact is, I did not know what to tell him," replied George.

"When I first missed the bonds, when you were in London——"

"Why did you not let me know then that they were missing?" was the interruption.

"I forgot it when you came home."

"But you should not have allowed yourself the possibility of forgetting a thing like that," remonstrated Thomas.

"Upon missing deeds of that value, or, in fact, of any value, however slight, you should have communicated with me the same hour, George," he added, after a pause, which George did not break; "I cannot understand how it was that you did not see the necessity of it yourself."

George Godolphin was running his hand through his hair,—in an absent manner, lost in thought, in, as might be conjectured,—the contemplation of the past time referred to. "How was I to think any thing but that you had moved the deeds?" he said.

"At all events, you should have ascertained. Why, George, were I to miss deeds that I believed to be in a given place, I could not rest a night without inquiring after them. I might assume—and there might be every probability for it—that you had moved them; but my sleep would be spoilt until I ascertained the fact."

George made no reply. I wonder where he was wishing himself! Mr. Godolphin resumed.

"In this instance, I do not see how you could have come to the conclusion that I had touched the bonds. Where did you think I was likely to move them to?"

George could not tell,—and said so. It was not impossible but Thomas might have sent them to town, or have

handed them back to Lord Averil, he continued to murmur, in a somewhat confused manner. Thomas looked at him; he could scarcely make him out, but supposed the loss had affected his equanimity.

"Had you regarded it dispassionately, George, I think you would have seen it in a more serious light. I should not be likely to move the bonds to a different place of keeping, without your cognizance; and as to returning them to Lord Averil, the transaction would have appeared in the books."

"I am sorry I forgot to mention it to you," said George.

"That you could have forgotten it, and continued to forget it until now, passes all belief. Has there never been a moment at any time, George, in this last month, that it has recurred to your memory?"

"Well, perhaps there may have been,—just a casual thought," acknowledged George. "I can't be sure."

"And yet you did not speak to me!"

"In your present state of health, I was willing to spare you unnecessary anxiety——"

"Stay, George. If you really assumed that I had moved the deeds, the asking me the question could not have been productive of anxiety. If any such fear, as that the deeds were missing without my agency, only crossed your mind, as a speculative suggestion, it was your bounden duty to acquaint me."

"I wish I could have dealt with the matter now without acquainting you," returned George. "Did not the London doctors warn you that repose of mind was, to you, essential?"

"George," was the impressive answer, and Thomas laid his hand upon his brother's arm as he spoke it, "so long as I pretend to transact business, to come to this bank, and sit here, its master, so long do I desire and request to be counted equal to discharge its duties efficiently. When I can no longer do that, I will withdraw from it. Never again suffer my state of

health to be a plea for keeping matters from me, however annoying or complicated they may be."

Thomas Godolphin spent half that day looking into other strong-boxes, lest perchance the missing deeds should have got into any,—though he did not see how that could be. They could not be found; but neither did any other paper of consequence, so far as could be recollected, appear to have disappeared. Thomas could not account for the loss in any way, or conjecture why it should have occurred, or who had taken the bonds. It was made known in the bank that a packet of deeds was missing; but full particulars were not given.

There were no certain data to go upon as to the time of the loss. George Godolphin stated that he had missed it a month ago; Thomas, when visiting Lord Averil's box for some purpose about four months ago, had seen the deeds there, secure. They must have disappeared between those periods. The mystery was—how? The clerks could not get to the strong-room, and to the safes and cases in it, unless by some strange accident; by some most unaccountable neglect. Very great neglect it would have been, to allow them the opportunity of getting to one key; but to obtain the three or four, necessary before those deeds could have been taken, and to obtain them undiscovered, was next door to an impossibility. The internal arrangements in the house of Godolphin, Crosse, and Godolphin were of a stringent nature: Sir George Godolphin had been a most particular man in business. Conjecture upon conjecture was hazarded; theory after theory discussed. When Mr. Hurde found the deeds were really gone, his amazement was excessive, his trouble great. George, as soon as he could, stole away from the discussion. He had got over his part, better perhaps than he had expected: all that remained now, was to make the best of the loss,—and to institute a search for the deeds.

"I can't call to mind a single one

that would do it, or that would be likely to do it," remarked Mr. Hurde, to his master.

"Of whom?"

"Of the clerks in the house sir. But, one of them, it must have been."

"A stranger it could not have been," replied Thomas Godolphin. "Had a midnight plunderer got into the bank, he would not have contented himself with one packet of deeds."

"Whoever took them, sir, took them to make money upon them. There's not a doubt of that. I wonder—I wonder——"

"What?" asked Mr. Godolphin.

"I wonder—I have often wondered, sir—whether Layton does not live above his income. If so——"

"Hurde," said Thomas Godolphin, gravely, "I believe Layton to be as honest as you or I."

"Well—I have always thought him so, or I should pretty soon have spoken. But, sir, the deeds must have gone somehow, by somebody's hands; and Layton is the least unlikely. I see him on a Sunday driving his new wife out in a gig. She plays the piano, too!"

How these items in the domestic economy of the clerk, Layton, could bear upon the loss of the deed, especially the latter item, Mr. Hurde did not further explain. He was of the old school, seeing no good in gigs, still less in pianos; and he determined to look a little after Mr. Layton.

Thomas Godolphin, straightforward and honorable, imparted to Lord Averil the fact of the deeds being missing. Whether he would have revealed it to a less intimate client at this early stage of the affair, might be a matter of speculation. The house would not yet call them lost, he said to Lord Averil: it trusted, by some fortunate accident, to put its hands upon them, in some corner-pigeonhole. Lord Averil received the communication with courteous friendliness: he thought it must prove that they had only been mislaid, and he hoped they would be found. Both gentlemen hoped that sincerely. The value was about six-

teen thousand pounds,—too much for either of them to lose with equanimity.

"George must have known of this when I asked him for the deeds a month ago," cried Lord Averil.

"I think not," replied Thomas Godolphin. "It was your asking for the deeds which caused him to visit the box for them, and he then found they were gone."

"Perhaps you are right. But I remember thinking his manner peculiar."

"How 'peculiar'?" inquired Thomas.

"Hesitating,—uncertain. He appeared at first not to know what I meant in asking for the deeds. Since you spoke to me of the loss, it struck me as accounting for George's manner—that he did not like to tell me of it."

"He could not have known of it then," repeated Thomas Godolphin.

As this concluding part of the conversation took place, they were coming out of the room. Isaac Hastings was passing along the passage, and heard a portion of it.

"Are they deeds of Lord Averil's that are missing?" he inquired confidentially of Mr. Hurde, later in the day.

The old clerk nodded an affirmative. "But you need not proclaim it there," he added, by way of caution, glancing sideways at the bank.

"Do you suppose I should?" returned Isaac Hastings.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A RED-LETTER DAY FOR MRS. BOND.

THE fragrant scent of the new-mown hay pervaded the atmosphere around Prior's Ash. A backward, cold spring it had been until the end of April, and wiseacres said how late the crops would be. But with May the weather had burst into the warmth of summer, vegetation came on all the more rapidly for its previous tardiness, and the

crops turned out to be ready early, instead of late.

Never a more lovely day gladdened the world than that particular day in June. Maria Godolphin, holding Miss Meta by the hand, walked along under the shady field-hedge, all glorious with its clusters of wild roses. The field was covered with hay, now being piled into cocks by the haymakers, and Meta darted ever and anon from her mother's side, to afford the valuable aid of her tiny hands. Meta would have enjoyed a roll on the hay with the most intense delight: but unfortunately Meta was in the full grandeur of visiting attire; not in simple hay-field undress. Had you asked Meta, she would have told you she had on her "best things." Things too good to be allowed to come to grief amidst the hay. Maria soothed the disappointment by a promise for the morrow. Meta should come in her brown holland dress with Margery, and roll about as much as she pleased. Children are easily satisfied, and Meta paced on soberly under the promise, only giving covetous glances to the hay. With all her impulsive gayety, her laughter and defiance of Margery, she was by nature a most gentle child, easily led.

Maria was on her way to call at Lady Godolphin's Folly; and thence at Ashlydyat. Maria was not given to the custom of making morning calls; she deemed it a very unsatisfactory waste of time. Convenient, no doubt, for gossips, but a sad clog on the serious business of life. She made them now and then; just enough to save her credit, and that was all. Mrs. Pain had honored Maria with about fifteen visits, and Maria was now going to return the lot in one. Nobody could say Charlotte made a business of ceremony; she would run in and out of people's houses as the whim took her, every day in the week sometimes, and on Maria amidst the rest. Of late, she had called more frequently on Maria than usual; and Maria, her conscience weighty with

the obligation, at last set out to return it.

But she had not dressed for it,—as some people would count dress, Charlotte herself, for instance. Charlotte would arrive, splendid as the sun; not a color of the rainbow came amiss to her; a green dress one day; a violet another, a crimson a third, and so on. Dresses with flounces and furbelows; jackets interlaced with gold and silver; brimless hats surmounted by bolt upright plumes. All that Charlotte wore was good, so far as cost went; so far as taste went, opinions differed. Maria had inherited the taste of her mother: she could not have been fine had you bribed her with gold. She wore to-day a pale dress of watered silk; a beautiful Cashmere shawl of thin texture, and a white bonnet: all plain and quiet, as befitted a lady. The charming day had induced her to walk; and the faint perfume of the hay, wafting over the streets of Prior's Ash, had allured her to choose the field way,—the longest way, but infinitely the pleasanter.

It took her past some tenements called familiarly the Pollard cottages; in one of which lived troublesome Mrs. Bond. All the inmates of these cottages were known well to Maria; she had been familiar with some of them from childhood: the rector of All Souls' was wont to say that he had more trouble with the Pollard cottages than with all the rest of his parish. For one thing, sickness was often prevalent in them; sometimes death; and they give trouble and anxiety to a conscientious pastor.

"Mamma, you going to see old Susan to-day?" chattered Meta, as they approached the cottages.

"Not to-day, Meta. I am going straight on to Mrs. Pain's."

Meta, who was troubled with no qualms on the score of ceremony herself, perceiving one of the doors open, darted suddenly inside it. Meta was rather in the habit of darting inside any open door that it took her fancy

so to do. Maria walked on a few steps, and then turned and waited; but the little truant did not appear to be in a hurry to come out, and she went back and followed her in.

A lady in a rusty black stuff gown, covered with snuff, her dirty cap all awry, and her face somewhat flushed, was seated in state before a round deal table, doing nothing; save contemplating certain articles that were on the table, with a remarkably gratified expression of countenance. The lady was Mrs. Bond: and this, as Maria was soon to hear, had been a decidedly red-letter day with her. On the table,—and it was this which appeared to be fascinating the attention of Meta, for the child seemed glued to it,—was a large wicker cage, containing a parrot, a small parrot with a plumage as fine as Mrs. Charlotte Pain's, and an angry-looking tuft on the head, not unlike her hat's tuft of feathers. Mrs. Bond's attention appeared not to be so much absorbed by the parrot and cage, as by a green medicine bottle, containing some clear-looking liquid, and a teacup without a handle. These two latter articles were standing immediately before her.

Several years ago, Mrs. Bond's eldest daughter, Peggy, a damsel who had not borne the brightest of characters, as to sober steadiness, had got taken out to Australia by a family to whom she engaged herself as nurse-girl. After sundry vicissitudes in that country,—which she duly chronicled home to her mother, and that lady was wont to relate in convivial moments, over tea or any other social beverage,—Peggy had come to an anchor by marrying. She wrote word that her husband was an industrious young carpenter, who was making his fortin, and they was quite at ease in the world. As a proof of the latter statements he had sent over a parrot to her mother, as a keepsake, and a trifle of money, which would be safely delivered by a friend, who was going the home-voyage.

The friend was faithful. He had arrived on his mission that very morn-

ing at Mrs. Bond's, delivering the parrot uninjured and in rude health,—if his capacity for screaming might be taken as a criterion. The money turned out to be eleven pounds; a ten-pound note, and a sovereign in gold. Peggy probably knew enough of her mother to be certain that the first outlay made would be for "something comforting," and this may have induced her to add a sovereign, in some faint hope that the note would be preserved intact. Mrs. Bond had the sense to discern this motive of Peggy's, and openly spoke of it to Maria. She was in an open mood. In point of fact she had gone right off to Prior's Ash and changed the sovereign, bringing home that green bottle full of—comfort. It was three parts empty now, and Mrs. Bond, in consequence, had become rather warm in the face, and was slipping some of her long words.

"But you will not think of changing the note, will you?" returned Maria, in answer to what Mrs. Bond disclosed. "How useful it would be to you in the winter for clothing and fire—if you would only keep it until then."

"So it 'ould," responded Mrs. Bond.

She dived into her pocket, and brought forth the note and a handful of silver, all lying there loose amidst a miscellaneous collection. "Don't it look pretty!" cried she.

"Very," said Maria, not certain whether she alluded to the parrot, or the money, for Mrs. Bond's eyes were not remarkably direct in their glances just now. "Too pretty to spend," she added, in reference to the note. "You had better give it to papa, Mrs. Bond, and let him take care of it for you."

Mrs. Bond shook her head at this proposition. "Once the parson gets hold on any little bit of our money to keep, he ain't free to give it up again," she objected. "'Keep it for this,' says he, or 'keep it for that;' and it ends in its being laid out as he likes, not as us do."

"As you please, of course," rejoined Maria. "I only thought it a pity

you should not derive some real benefit from this money. If you keep it yourself you may be induced to change it, and then it might dwindle away in trifles, and do you no good."

"That it 'ould!" acknowledged Mrs. Bond. "I've a'most a mind to let it be took care on, after all. If 'twas anybody but the rector!"

"Shall I keep it for you?" asked Maria.

"Well now, 'ould you, ma'am?"

"Yes, I will,—if you please."

Mrs. Bond detached the note from the silver and other articles which she had brought up indiscriminately from her pocket. They lay in her capacious lap, and appeared to afford food for gratification to Meta, who had come round from the parrot to look at them. A brass thimble, a damp blue-bag, some halfpence, a receipt for curing corns, a piece of ginger, and the end of a tallow-candle, with a long snuff, being amongst the items.

"You'll promise to let me have it back if I ask for it?" cried she, clutching the note tight in her hand, and waiting for Maria's promise before she would surrender it.

"Certainly I will. Whenever you wish for it, you shall have it. Only," Maria added, smiling, "if you ask for it too soon, I shall beg you still to let me keep it on. Don't you remember how sadly off you were last winter? Just think what a ten-pound note would have done for you then, Mrs. Bond!"

"Lawks, ay! It 'ud a got me through the cold beautiful."

"And I hope you will let this get you through next year's cold," returned Maria, putting the note in her purse.

"Ay, sure! But now, ain't it kind o' Peggy?"

"Yes. It is delightful to hear that she is so well settled at last."

"I've been a-drinking her health, and better luck still," said Mrs. Bond, taking the cork out of the bottle, and pouring out the half of its remaining contents. "'Ould ye just take a drain, ma'am?"

"No, thank you," replied Maria. "I don't like the smell of it."

"No!" returned Mrs. Bond, who, truth to say, but for the "drains" she had taken herself, and which had tended slightly to muddle her perceptions, would never have thought of proffering the invitation. "Not like the smell! It were tencepence the half-pint!"

Maria took the child's hand. Meta gave it reluctantly: that new sight, the parrot, possessing attraction for her. "I'll come again and see it tomorrow," said she to Mrs. Bond. "I'll come with Margery. I am coming to play in the hay-field."

"Ay," returned Mrs. Bond. "Ain't it pretty! It's the best Old Tom."

She was evidently getting a little indisposed in the intellects. Had Maria been a strong-minded district visitor, given to reforming the evils of the parish, she might have read Mrs. Bond a lecture on sobriety, and walked off with the bottle. Mrs. Bond and such medicine-bottles had, however, been too long and well acquainted with each other to admit any hope of their effectual parting now; and the last thing Maria caught, as she glanced back, was a vision of that lady's head thrown back, the inverted teacup on her lips.

"The note would have been changed before the week was out!" was Maria's mental comment.

Without further adventure, she reached Lady Godolphin's Folly. Charlotte had visitors. A country squire's wife, with her two daughters, had come for a few days from their sober residence at a few miles' distance, to the attractions of the Folly. Charlotte could make it attractive when she liked; and invitations to it were in demand, which has been previously remarked. If people did think Mrs. Pain somewhat "fast" in her manners, she was no faster than some others. And it is said to be the fashion, you know.

Charlotte was in one of her pleasantest moods, and Maria had rarely seen her look so well. She wore a

morning-dress of pink-spotted muslin, made simply, and confined at the waist by a band. Her hair was dressed simply, also, brought rather low on her cheeks, and rolled: even Margery could not have found fault with her looks that morning.

Or with her manner either. She regaled Meta with strawberries; and when they were finished, caught her up in her arms, and carried her out by the glass door.

"Do not keep her long, Mrs. Pain," said Maria. "I must be going."

"Where is your hurry?" asked Charlotte.

"I am going on to Ashlydyat."

Charlotte departed with Meta, and Maria continued with the ladies, Charlotte's guests. They had been talking a few minutes, when loud screams of terror from Meta alarmed their ears. Maria hastened out in the direction of the sound, her cheeks and lips alike blanched.

She came upon them,—Charlotte and the child,—in that secluded, lovely spot amidst the grove of trees, where Charlotte Pain,—and you saw her,—had held an interview with her future husband, Rodolf, on George Godolphin's wedding-day. Charlotte had carried the child there, and set her on the mossy turf, and called her dogs around. She had done it, thinking to give pleasure to the child: but Meta was of a timid nature; she was not used to dogs; and upon one of them springing on her with a bark, "all for play," as Charlotte said, her fear broke forth in terrific cries. When Maria reached them, Charlotte had caught up Meta in her arms, and was kicking the dogs off.

Meta sprung from Charlotte's arms to her mother's, with a great cry. Maria, not so strongly-framed as Charlotte, could not hold this child of between five and six at her ease, but was fain to stagger with her to the garden bench. Meta lay in her lap, clinging to her and sobbing convulsively.

"My darling, what is it?" whispered Maria. "What has hurt you?"

"Oh, mamma, send them away. Send them away!" cried the little imploring voice.

"Would you be so kind as to send the dogs away, Mrs. Pain?" asked Maria. "I think she is frightened at them."

"I know she is, foolish little thing!" answered Charlotte, going off with the dogs. Apparently she disposed of them somewhere, for she was back the next minute without them. Maria was in the same place, holding her child to her heart.

"Mrs. George Godolphin, don't you think you will have to answer sometime for the manner in which you are rearing that child?" began she gravely.

"In what way?" returned Maria.

"You are bringing her up to be as timid as yourself."

"Am I particularly timid?"

"You! Why you know you are. You don't ride; you'd not drive for the world; you are afraid of dogs?"

"I could manage to ride a quiet pony," said Maria. "As to dogs, I confess that I am a little afraid of them, if they are rough."

"If a dog only barks, you call it 'rough,'" retorted Charlotte. "But now, what has been the fault in all this?—why, your defective education. Had you been reared amongst horses and dogs, you might have been as bold with them as I am. And you are bringing up that child to the same deficiencies."

"I do not think it essential that a child should be reared amongst horses and dogs," debated Maria. "For myself, I am naturally timid, and I do not think any amount of use would entirely overcome it. Meta is the same. Although she seems so gay and laughing, she is a gentle, timid child at heart. See how she trembles still?"

"Yes, I see, poor little dear! It is not her fault. Meta, pretty one, they were only playing with you. Do you

know what I should do, were the child mine?" she resumed to Maria.

"No. What?"

"I should just put her down again, and call the dogs round her, and let her battle it out with them. They would not hurt her; there's no fear of that; and it would teach her to overcome the fear."

"Oh, Mrs. Pain!" Maria involuntarily strained her child closer to her, and Meta, who had heard the words, pushed her little hot face of distress nearer to its shelter. "It might send her into such a state of terror, that she would never get over it. She would be frightened at dogs for her life. *That* is not the way to treat children, indeed, Mrs. Pain!"

"It is the way I should treat mine, if I had any: the way to make them grow up brave, and not little cowards. It is the way I should have Meta treated, for her own sake, had I any influence over her."

Perhaps Maria felt thankful that Charlotte had not. But she could not admit that Meta had shown undue timidity in this instance. "Most children would be frightened, Mrs. Pain, at being surrounded suddenly by a crowd of barking dogs."

"Granted,—if they have been reared as Meta has. I wonder Mr. George Godolphin does not see to it."

"I don't think he would wish her to be too bold with dogs,—or brave, as you would call it," was the quiet reply of Maria. "I have seen her play with one little dog. It was a crowd of them, the noise, that frightened her."

Meta could not be coaxed down again. Maria was not strong enough to carry her to the house, so Charlotte took her up in her arms. But the child would not loose her hand from her mother's, and Maria had to walk along, holding it.

"You pretty little timid goose!" cried Charlotte, kissing her. "Whatever would you do if you were to lose your mamma?"

"It would be a calamity, would it not, Meta?" said Maria, speaking in

a half-joking tone; and Charlotte answered in the same light spirit.

"A calamity in one sense, of course. But she might get a chance then of having a little of the rust rubbed out of her."

Maria smiled, a smile of politeness. "What do you call rust?" she asked, "It is what you would term timidity: I, cowardice. Meta, we must get some more strawberries after this."

But Meta could not be seduced to strawberries. The dogs had terrified her too effectually, and she was in bodily dread that they might come again. Maria said farewell, and led her away, bending her steps to Ashlydyat.

She found the Miss Godolphins alone. Janet was reading some serious work; Bessy was looking over her accounts of the "clothing-fund" of All Souls' parish; Cecil was seated near the window, doing nothing, save dreamily gazing out of it. Quiet and settled they all looked, until Meta arrived to upset them. Meta, an intense favorite, was allowed to upset Ashlydyat as she pleased,—to do any thing in it except run into unused passages.

Cecil woke out of her reverie, caught hold of Meta to run away with her and take her things off; now she was there, she must stay for the day; they could not let her depart again. Meta's feet, however, were rooted to the carpet until she had asked a question: "Would the dogs come to her?"

So Maria had to explain: that Meta had been frightened by Mrs. Pain's dogs. Janet gravely assured her that the dogs would not come to Ashlydyat, and Meta allowed herself to be taken possession of by Cecil, introducing the subject of Mrs. Bond's beautiful parrot and its large cage as she was going away.

"We have heard about the parrot," remarked Bessy to Maria. "Susan Satcherly hobbled up here this morning, and mentioned its arrival. Susan hopes it won't scream all night as well

as all day; she can hear it next door as though the parrot were present there. A ten-pound note has come also, she says. Which I am almost sorry for," added Bessy; "though I suppose Mrs. Bond would think me terribly ill-natured if she heard me say so. She will change that note to-day, and never rest until the last shilling of it shall be spent."

"No, she will not," returned Maria, laughing, and holding out the note in triumph. "She has given it to me to keep for her."

"Never!" exclaimed Bessy, in surprise. "You must have exercised some sleight-of-hand, Maria, to get that!"

Maria laughed. "She was in an unusually tractable humor, Bessy. The fact is, a sovereign had arrived as well as the bank-note; and that she had changed."

Bessy nodded her head. She knew Mrs. Bond of old. "I understand," said she. "Was she very bad, Maria?"

"No; not then. But I can't say what she may be before the day is over. She pulled a handful of silver out of her pocket."

"Now mind, Maria,—don't you give her up that note, let her ask for it ever so," advised Bessy. "Keep it until winter."

"If I can,—if she will allow me," replied Maria. "But she only resigned it to me on condition that I would give it up to her if she asked for it. I promised that I would."

"I should not; promise or no promise," returned Bessy. "The keeping it would be for her good, you know, Maria."

Maria shook her head. She could not be strong-minded, like Bessy was, acting for people's good against their will; and she could not go from her promise. She returned the note to her purse, knowing that Mrs. Bond would get it, if she chose to demand it.

Maria was easily persuaded to remain for the day at Ashlydyat. She sat at the window in the height of

enjoyment. It was enjoyment to Maria Godolphin: the sitting in idle stillness on a calm summer's day. The lovely flowers of Ashlydyat's garden, its velvet lawns, were stretched out before her; the white walls of Lady Godolphin's Folly rose in the distance; and Maria sat in the easy-chair in luxurious listlessness, her fair white hands lying in her lap. Meta was away somewhere, fascinating the household, and all was rest. Rest from exertion, rest from care. The time came when Maria looked back on that day of peace at Ashlydyat: and believed it must have been heaven.

Janet sent a note to the bank, to desire George to come up to dinner with Thomas. When Thomas arrived, however, he was alone. George was out, therefore the note had not been given him. They supposed he would be up in the evening, and dined without him.

But the evening passed on, and he did not come. Thomas's private opinion was that George must have remained to search for the missing deed. Thomas could not be easy under such a misfortune,—as it might in truth be called. The sum was by far too weighty a one to be lost with equanimity. And that was not all: there was the unpleasant uncertainty with regard to the disappearance. Thomas mentioned the matter in confidence amongst them. At least, to Maria and Janet: the other two had gone out with Meta. Janet observed that he appeared absorbed in thought, as if uneasy at something; and he readily acknowledged that he had been rendered uneasy by a circumstance which had occurred during the day: the missing of some deeds that they had believed to be in safe custody.

"What if you cannot find them, Thomas?" asked Janet.

"Then we must make good the loss."

"Is it to a heavy amount?"

"Very."

Janet looked startled. Thomas's grave manner did not tend to reassure

her. She gave utterance to some half articulate words.

"It is a heavy amount as a loss," explained Thomas. "In fact, it is a large sum in itself. It would cost us over sixteen thousand pounds to make it good."

Janet lifted her hands in dismay. "And all from the loss of a single packet of deeds!"

"Even so."

"But how can they have been lost?"

"There it is," said Thomas Godolphin. "If we could tell as much as that, it would be some satisfaction. We cannot imagine how or when they were lost. George missed them a month ago, but——"

"A month ago! Did George miss them a month ago?"

It was Maria who interrupted, eagerness in her manner and voice. It had occurred to her that the fact might account for a certain restlessness, an anxiety in George's manner, which she had not failed to remark in it of late. The next words of Thomas Godolphin served to dissipate the illusion.

"George looked for the deeds a month ago. Not finding them in the box, he concluded that I had moved them. Therefore we cannot be said to have known of the loss until to-day."

"George ought to have asked you," said Janet.

"Yes, he ought," acquiesced Thomas. But it was all he said.

"It is just like careless George!" exclaimed Janet. "Should the time ever come that he is sole at the bank, I do not know how it will get on! To whom did the deeds belong, Thomas?"

"To Lord Averil."

"You are sure you had them?" asked cautious Janet.

A half smile crossed Thomas Godolphin's lips. "Quite sure, Janet. You understand," he added, looking at them both, "we do not care that this should be spoken of. You are safe, I know, Janet, and Maria would most likely hear it from George."

Maria had been buried in a reverie. "I cannot conceive how it is possible for any thing to have been lost from the strong-room," she said, lifting her head. "All about us are trustworthy. And, were they not, there would be no practicability of their getting to the safes in the strong-room."

"You are right, Maria," said Thomas. "I have thought of it until I am bewildered."

Maria seemed to be getting bewildered also. She was thinking of it in its every aspect and bearing. Many little back incidents, proving that her husband was ill at ease, had something on his mind, rushed into her memory. She had not thought much of them before: but they grew strangely vivid now. The missing of deeds of this value would amply account for it.

"Thomas," said she, speaking out her thoughts, "do you not think George must have feared there was something wrong, when he missed them at first? I do."

"No. Why do you think it?"

"Because——" Maria stopped. It suddenly occurred to her that it might not be quite right to comment upon her husband's manner, what it had, or what it had not been; that he might not like her to do it, although it was only to his brother and sister. So she turned it off: speaking any indifferent words that came uppermost.

"It is curious, missing a packet of deeds of that value from its place, that he should not have feared it might be missing in reality."

"The very fact of his not asking me about it, Maria, proves that no suspicion of wrong crossed his mind," was the comment of Thomas Godolphin. "He supposed I had placed it elsewhere."

"That's just like George!" repeated Janet. "Taking things on trust, like he takes people! A child might deceive him."

"I hope we shall find them yet," said Thomas Godolphin.

"Does Lord Averil——"

What Janet might be going to in-

quire was never known. The words were stopped by a strange noise, an appalling noise, apparently at the very door of the room they were sitting in. A loud, prolonged, discordant noise, unlike any thing they had ever heard. Some might have compared it to the shrieks of a strong giant in his agony; some to the hoarse screams of a bird of prey. But it was unlike either: it was unlike any thing earthly.

With one bound, they flew to the hall, on which the room opened, Maria white with terror. The servants came rushing from their apartments, and stood in consternation.

What was the noise? What had caused it? The questions were pouring forth from all. The hall was perfectly empty, save for the startled gazers; the doors and windows had been closed. Thomas walked to the entrance-door and looked beyond it, beyond the porch, but nothing was there. The space was empty; the evening was calm and still. At a distance, borne on the evening air, could be heard the merry laughter of Meta, playing with Bessy and Cecil. Thomas came in and closed the door again.

"I cannot think what it could have been!" he observed, speaking generally.

The servants were ready with answering remarks. One had thought this; one had thought that; another, something else. They ranged their eyes curiously up and around, as accurately as the growing darkness would permit. Maria had laid hold of Janet: glad, perhaps, that it was too dark for her white face to be discerned. It was the *sound* which had so terrified her: no association in her mind was connected with it: and it was the sound which had terrified the servants and sent their faces white. They had never heard a sound like unto it in all their lives.

"It must have been a night-bird,

shrieking as he flew over the house," observed Mr. Godolphin.

But, in truth, he so spoke only in the absence of any other possible assumption, and against his own belief. No bird of prey, known to ornithology, could have made that noise, even had he been inside the hall to do it. Ten birds of prey could not have made it. Thomas, like the rest, felt bewildered.

The servants began to move away. There was nothing to be seen in the dark hall more than usual; nothing to be heard. As the last one disappeared, Thomas turned to the drawing-room door, and held it open for his sister and Maria.

At that moment, at that very moment when they had gone in and Thomas was following, the noise came again. Loud, prolonged, shrill, unearthly! WHAT was it? Were the rafters of the house loosening? the walls rending asunder? Were the skies opening for the crack of doom? They gathered in the hall again; master, ladies, servants; and stood there, motionless, appalled, bewildered, their faces whiter than before.

Its echoes died away to the tune of shrieks. Human shrieks this time, and not unfamiliar. One of the women-servants, excited beyond repression, had fallen into hysterics.

But whence had proceeded that noise? Where had been its centre? Outside the house, or inside the house?—in its walls, in its passages, in its hall?—where? Its sound had been everywhere. In short, what had caused it? what had it been?

They could not tell. It was a problem beyond human philosophy to solve. They could not tell then; they could not tell afterwards. It has been no ideal scene that I have depicted, as I could call upon living witnesses to testify,—witnesses who can no more account for those unearthly sounds now, than they could account for them then.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ISAAC HASTINGS TURNS TO THINKING.

THE revelation to Isaac Hastings, that the deeds, missing, belonged to Lord Averil, set that young gentleman thinking. Like his father, like his sister Grace, he was an exceedingly accurate observer, given to take note of passing events. He had keen perception, a retentive memory for trifles, great powers of comparison and concentration. What with one thing and another, he had been a little puzzled lately by Mr. George Godolphin. There had been sundry odds and ends, out of the common, to be detected in Mr. George's manner,—not patent to the generality of people who are mostly unobservant, but sufficiently conspicuous to Isaac Hastings. Anxiety about letters; trifles in the every-day conduct of the bank; one little circumstance, touching a delay in paying some money, which Isaac, and he alone, had become accidentally cognizant of; all formed food for speculation. There had been the somewhat doubtful affair of George Godolphin's secret journey to London, leaving word with his wife that he was accompanying Captain St. Aubyn on the road to Portsmouth, which had traveled to the knowledge of Isaac through the want of reticence of Charlotte Pain. More than all, making more impression upon Isaac, had been the strange, shrinking fear displayed by George that Saturday when he had announced Lord Averil,—a fear succeeded by a confusion of manner that proved his master must for the moment have lost his presence of mind utterly. Isaac Hastings had announced the names of other gentlemen that day and the announcement, equally with themselves, had been received with the most perfect equanimity. Isaac had often thought of that little episode since, and wondered,—wondered what there could be in Lord Averil's visit to scare Mr. George Godolphin. It recurred to him now with double distinctness.

The few words he had overheard, spoken between Lord Averil and Mr. Godolphin,—the former saying that George must have known of the loss of the deeds when he had asked for them a month ago, that he judged so by his manner, which was peculiar, hesitating, uncertain, "as though he had known of the loss then, and did not like to tell of it."

To the strangeness of manner, Isaac himself could have borne ready witness. Had this strangeness been caused by the knowledge of the loss of the deeds?—if so, why did not George Godolphin make a stir about them then? Only on the previous day, when Lord Averil had again made his appearance, Isaac had been further struck with George's startled hesitation, and with his refusal to see him. He had sent out word, as the plea of excuse, that he was particularly engaged: Isaac had believed at the time that George was no more engaged than he was. And now, this morning, when it could not be concealed any longer, came the commotion. The deeds were gone; they had disappeared from their secure abiding-place in the most unaccountable manner,—nobody knowing how or when.

What did it all mean? Isaac Hastings asked himself the question as he pursued his business in the bank, amidst the other clerks. *He could not help asking it.* A mind, constituted as was that of Isaac Hastings, thoughtful, foreseeing, penetrating, cannot help entering upon these speculations when surrounding circumstances call them forth. Could it be that George Godolphin had fallen into secret embarrassment?—that he—that he—had abstracted the deed himself, and *used* it? Isaac felt his cheek flush with shame at the thought,—with shame that he should allow himself to think such a thing of a Godolphin; and yet, he could not help it. No. Do as he would, he could not drive the thought away: it remained to haunt him. And the longer it stayed, the more vivid it grew.

Ought he to give a hint of this to

his father? He did not know. On the one hand there was sober reason, which told him George Godolphin was not likely to be guilty of such a thing; on the other, lay his fancy, whispering that it *might* be. Things as strange had been enacted lately, as the public knew. Men, in an equally good position with George Godolphin, were proved to have been living upon fraud for years. Isaac was fond of newspapers, and knew all they could tell him. What, if any thing came wrong to *this* bank? Why, then, Mr. Hastings would be a ruined man. It was not only the loss of his own life's savings, that were in the hands of Godolphin, Crosse and Godolphin, but there was the large sum he had placed there as trustee to the little Chisholms.

Isaac Hastings lingered in the bank till the last that evening. All had gone except Mr. Hurde. The latter was preparing to leave, when Isaac went up to him, leaning his arms upon the desk.

"What a strange thing it is about those deeds, Mr. Hurde!" cried he, in a low tone.

Mr. Hurde nodded.

"It is troubling me amazingly," went on Isaac.

This seemed to arouse the old clerk, and he looked up, speaking curtly.

"Why should it trouble you? You didn't take them, I suppose."

"No, I didn't," said Isaac.

"Very well, then. The loss won't fall upon you. There's no cause for *your* troubling."

Isaac was silent. In truth he was unable to give any reason for the "troubling," except on general grounds: he could not say that a doubt was haunting his mind as to the good faith of Mr. George Godolphin.

"It is a loss which I suppose Mr. George will have to make good, as they were in his custody," he resumed. "My sister won't like it, I fear."

The observation recalled Mr. Hurde's memory to the fact that Mrs.

George Godolphin was the sister of Isaac Hastings. It afforded a sufficient excuse for the remarks in the mind of the clerk, and somewhat mollified him.

"It is to be hoped they'll be found," said he. "I don't see how they could have gone."

"Nor I," returned Isaac. "The worst is, if they *have* gone——"

"What?" asked Mr. Hurde, for Isaac had stopped.

"That perhaps money has been made of them."

Mr. Hurde grunted. "They have not been taken for nothing, you may be sure."

"If they have been taken," persisted Isaac.

"If they have been taken," assented Mr. Hurde. "I don't believe they have. From the sheer impossibility of anybody's getting to them, I don't believe it. And I shan't believe it, until every nook and corner between the four walls here shall have been hunted over."

"How do you account for their disappearance, then?"

"I think they must have been moved inadvertently."

"Nobody could so move them except Mr. Godolphin or Mr. George," rejoined Isaac.

"Mr. Godolphin has not moved them," returned the clerk, in a testy tone of reproof. "Mr. Godolphin is too accurate a man of business to move deeds inadvertently, or to move them and forget it the next moment. Mr. George may have done it. In searching for any thing in the strong-room, if he has had more than one case open at once, he may have put these deeds back in their wrong place, or even brought them up-stairs."

Isaac considered for a minute, and then shook his head. "I should not think it," he answered.

"Well, it is the only supposition I can come to," was the concluding remark of Mr. Hurde. "It is next to an impossibility, Mr. Godolphin excepted, that anybody else can have got to the deeds."

He was drawing on his gloves as he spoke to depart. Isaac went out with him, but their roads lay different ways. Isaac turned towards All Souls' rectory, and walked along in a deep reverie.

The rectory hours were early, and he found them at tea: his mother, Rose, and Grace. Grace—Mrs. Ake-man by her new name—was spending the evening with them, with her baby. The rector, who had gone out in the afternoon, had not come in yet.

Isaac took his tea, and then strolled into the garden. Rose and the baby were making a great noise, and Grace was helping them. It disturbed Isaac in his perplexed thought, and he made a mental vow that if ever he got promoted to a home of his own with babies in it, they should be hermetically confined in some top-room, or out of sight and hearing.

By-and-by, when he was leaning over the gate, looking into the road, Mr. Hastings came up. Isaac told him that tea was over: but Mr. Hastings said he had taken a cup with one of his parishioners. He had apparently walked home quick, and he lifted his hat and wiped his brow.

"Glorious weather for the haymaking, Isaac!"

"Is it?" returned Isaac, abstractedly.

"*Is it!*" repeated Mr. Hastings. "Where are your senses, boy?"

Isaac laughed, and roused himself. "I fear they were buried just then, sir. I was thinking of something that has happened at the bank, to-day. A loss has been discovered."

"A loss?" repeated Mr. Hastings. "A loss of what?"

Isaac explained, dropping his voice to a low tone, and speaking confidentially. They were leaning over the gate, side by side. Mr. Hastings rather liked to take recreative moments of leaning there, exchanging a nod and a word with the passers-by. At this hour of the evening, however, the road was generally free.

"How can the deeds have gone?"

exclaimed Mr. Hastings,—like every body else said.

"I don't know," replied Isaac, twitching off a spray of the hedge, and beginning to bite at the thorns. "I suppose it is all right," he presently added.

"Right in what way?" asked Mr. Hastings.

"I suppose George Godolphin's all right, I mean."

The words were as an unknown tongue to Mr. Hastings. He did not fathom them. "You suppose that George Godolphin is all right!" he exclaimed. "You speak in riddles, Isaac."

"I cannot say I *suspect* any thing wrong, sir; but the doubt has crossed me. It never would have done so but for George Godolphin's manner."

Mr. Hastings turned his penetrating gaze on his son. "Speak out," said he. "Tell me what it is you mean."

Isaac did so. Relating the circumstances of the loss; with the confusion of manner he had observed in Mr. George Godolphin, on the visits of Lord Averil, and his reluctance to receive them. One little matter he suppressed,—the stolen visit of George to London, and deceit to Maria, relative to it. Isaac did not see what that could have had to do with the loss of the deeds, and some feeling prompted him that it was not a pleasant thing to name to his father. Mr. Hastings did not speak for a few minutes.

"Isaac, I see no good grounds for your doubts," he said, at length. "The bank is too flourishing for that. Perhaps you meant only as to George?"

"I can scarcely tell whether I really meant any thing," replied Isaac. "The doubts arose to me, and I thought I would mention them to you. I dare say my fancy is to blame: it does run riot sometimes."

A silence supervened. Mr. Hastings broke it. "With a keen man of business like Thomas Godolphin at the head of affairs, George could not go far wrong, I should presume. I think he spends enough on his own

store, mark you, Isaac; but that has nothing to do with the prosperity of the bank."

"Of course not. Unless——"

"Unless what? Why don't you speak out?"

"Because I am not sure of my premises, sir," frankly answered Isaac. "Unless he were to have got himself irretrievably embarrassed, and should be using the bank's funds, I believe I was about to say."

"Pretty blind moles some of you must be, in that case! Could such a thing be done without the cognizance of the house?—of Mr. Hurde, and of Thomas Godolphin?"

"Well—no—I don't much think it could," hesitated Isaac, who was not at all certain upon the point. "At any rate, not to any extent. I suppose one of my old crotchets—as Grace used to call them—has taken possession of me, rendering me absurdly fanciful. I dare say it is all right,—except that the deeds are mislaid."

"I dare say it is," acquiesced the rector. "I should be sorry to think it otherwise,—for many reasons. Grace is here, is she not?"

"Grace is here, and Grace's son-and-heir, making enough noise for ten. I can't think why Grace——"

"What are you taking my name in vain for?" interrupted Grace's own voice. She had come up to them carrying the very son-and-heir that Isaac had been complaining of,—a young gentleman with a bald head, just beginning to exercise his hands in dumb fights, as well as his lungs. "Papa, mamma says, are you not going in to tea?"

Before the rector could answer, or Isaac extricate his hair from the unconsciously mischievous little hands which had seized upon it, by Grace's connivance, there came a gay party of equestrians round the corner of the road,—Charlotte Pain, with the two young ladies, her guests; Lady Sarah and Miss Grame, who sometimes hired horses for a ride; and three or four gentlemen. Amongst the latter were

George Godolphin and Lord Averil. Lord Averil had met them accidentally and joined their party. He was riding by the side of Charlotte Pain.

"I say, Grace!" hastily exclaimed Isaac, twitching away his head, "take that baby in, out of sight. Look there!"

"Take my baby in!" resentfully spoke Grace. "What for? I am not ashamed to be seen holding it. Keeping only two servants, I must turn nurse sometimes,—and people know that I must. I am not situated as Maria is, with half a score at her beck and call."

Isaac did not prolong the discussion. He thought, if he owned an ugly baby with no hair, he should not be so fond of showing it off. Grace stood her ground, and the baby stood his, and lifted its head and its arms by way of greeting. Isaac wondered that it did not lift its voice as well.

The party exchanged bows as they rode past. George Godolphin—he was riding by the side of Sarah Anne Grame—withdraw his horse from the throng and rode up.

"How are you, Grace? How is the baby?"

"Look at him," returned Grace, in answer, holding the gentleman higher.

"Shall I take him for a ride?" asked George, laughing.

"Not if you paid me his value in gold," answered Grace, bluntly.

George's gay blue eyes twinkled. "What may that value be? Your estimation of it, Grace?"

"Never mind," said Grace. "I can tell you that your bank would not meet it,—no, not if all its coffers were filled to the brim."

"I see," cried George: "he is inestimable. Do not set your heart too entirely upon him, Grace," he continued, his voice changing.

"Why not?" she asked.

"Maria had to lose some; equally dear."

"That is true," said Grace, in a softened tone. "How is Maria today?"

"Quite well, thank you. She went

to Ashlydyat this afternoon, and I dare say has remained there. Famous weather for the hay, is it not, sir?" he added to the rector.

"Couldn't be better," replied Mr. Hastings.

George rode off at a canter. The baby burst into a cry; perhaps that he could not go off at a canter too; and Grace, after a vain attempt to hush him, carried him into the house. The rector remained, looking over the gate.

"Things going wrong with him!—No! He could not be so easy under it," was his mental conclusion. "It is all right, depend upon it," he added aloud to his son.

"I think it must be, sir," was the reply of Isaac Hastings.

CHAPTER XL.

A NIGHTMARE FOR THE RECTOR OF ALL SOULS'.

THE Reverend Mr. Hastings had audibly expressed a wish never again to be left in the responsible situation of trustee, and the Reverend Mr. Hastings echoed it a second time as he ascended a gig which was to convey him to Binham. A vestry-meeting had been called for that evening at seven o'clock, but something arose during the day connected with the trust, and at four Mr. Hastings set off in a gig to see Brierly, the late agent to the Chisholm property. "I'll be back by seven if I can, Smith," he observed to his clerk,—if not, the meeting must commence without me."

The way to Binham lay through shady lanes and unfrequented roads,—unfrequented as compared to roads where the traffic is great. It was a small place about six miles' distance from Prior's Ash, and the rector enjoyed the drive. The day was warm and fine as the previous one had been,—when you saw Maria Godolphin

walking through the hayfield. Shady trees in some parts met overhead, the limes gave forth their sweet perfume, the heavy crops of grass gladdened the rector's eye,—some not cut, some in process of being converted into hay by laborers, who looked off to salute the well-known clergyman as he drove past.

"I might have brought Rose, after all," he soliloquized. "She would have had a nice drive,—only she'd have been, half an hour getting ready."

He found Mr. Brierly at home, and their little matter of business was soon concluded. Mr. Hastings had other places to call at in the town: he had always plenty of people to see when he went to Binham, for he knew everybody in it.

"I wish you would take something," said the agent.

"I can't stay," replied Mr. Hastings. "I shall find old Mrs. Chisholm at tea, and can snatch a cup with her, standing. That won't hinder time. You have not heard from Harknar?"

"No,—not directly. His brother thinks he will be at home next week."

"The sooner the better. I want the affair settled, and the money placed out."

He held out his hand as he spoke. Mr. Brierly, who, in days long gone past, when they were both boys together, had been an old schoolfellow of the rector's, put his own into it. But he did not withdraw it: he appeared to be in some hesitation.

"Mr. Hastings, excuse me," he said, presently, speaking slowly. "Have you kept the money, which I paid you over, in your own possession?"

"Of course not. I took it the same night to the bank."

"Ay,—I guessed you would. Is it safe?" he added, lowering his voice.

"Safe!" echoed Mr. Hastings.

"I'll tell you why I speak. Rutt the lawyer, over at your place, was here this afternoon, and in the course of conversation he dropped a hint

that something was wrong at Godolphins'. It was not known yet, he said, but it would be."

Mr. Hastings paused. "Did he state his grounds for asserting it?"

"No. From what I could gather, it appeared that he spoke from some vague rumor."

"I think I can explain it," said Mr. Hastings. "A deed belonging to one of their clients has been lost,—has disappeared, at any rate, in some unaccountable manner; and this, I expect, must have given rise to the rumor. But the loss of twenty such deeds, all to be made good, would not shake the solvency of Godolphin, Crosse, and Godolphin."

"That must be it, then! What simpletons people are!—swallowing down any absurd rumor that gets afloat,—converting a molehill into a mountain! I thought it was strange, for a stable old house like the Godolphins."

"Let me recommend you, Brierly, not to mention it further. If such a report got about, it might cause a run on the bank. Not but what, so far as I believe, the bank could stand any run that might be made upon it."

"I should not have mentioned it at all, except to you," returned Mr. Brierly. "And only to you, because I expected the Chisholms' money was there. Rutt is not a safe man to speak after, at the best of times. I told him I did not believe him. And I did not. Still,—if any thing were to happen, and I had bottled up the rumor, not giving you a hint of it, I should never cease to blame myself."

"That is the origin of it, you may depend,—the loss of the deed,"—observed the rector. "I know the clerks were questioned about that yesterday, and some of them must have got talking out-of-doors. Good-day, Brierly."

Mr. Hastings paid the rest of his visits and drove home. In spite of himself, he could not keep his mind from reverting—and somewhat unpleasantly—to what he had heard. He believed the bank to be perfectly

solvent,—to be more than solvent. Until the previous evening, when Isaac had made that communication to him, he had been ready to answer for its flourishing state on his own responsibility, if required. He fully believed the rumor, spoken of by Rutt the lawyer, to arise from some distorted hints of the missing deeds which had oozed out, and to have no other foundation whatever: and yet, he could not keep his mind from reverting to it uneasily.

The ting-tang (it deserved no better name, and Prior's Ash gave it no other) of All Souls' Church was sending forth its last notes as the rector drove in. Handing over the horse and gig to the waiting-servant of the friend from whom it was borrowed,—a gig always at the disposal of the rector,—he made his way to the vestry, and had the pleasure of presiding at a stormy meeting. There were divided parties in the parish at that time, touching a rate to be made, or a non-rate; and opposing eloquence ran high. Personally, the rector was not an interested party; but he had a somewhat difficult course to steer between the two and offend neither. It was half-past nine when the meeting broke up.

"Any news of that missing deed, Isaac?" he took an opportunity of asking his son.

"I think not," replied Isaac. "We have heard nothing about it to-day."

"I suppose things have gone on, then, as usual?"

"Quite so. We shall hear no more of it, I dare say, in the bank. If it can't be found, the firm will have to make it good, and there'll be an end of it."

"A very unsatisfactory ending, I should think, if I had to make it good," observed the rector. "I don't like things disappearing, nobody knows how or why."

He said no more. He gave no hint to Isaac of the hint that had been whispered to him, nor questioned him upon its probable founda-

tion. It was the best proof that Mr. Hastings assigned to it no foundation. In his sober reason he did not.

But things—troubles, cares, annoyances wear different aspects in the day and in the night. More than all, *suspense* wears a different one. An undefined dread, whatever may be its nature, can be drowned by the daily bustle,—business, pleasure, occupations. These fill up the mind, and the bugbear is lost sight of. But at night, when the head lies upon the sleepless pillow, and there's nothing to distract the thoughts,—when all around is silent darkness,—then, if there is an inner, secret dread, it shines out in colors unnaturally vivid, and presents itself in guise worse than the reality.

Mr. Hastings was not an imaginative man. Quite the contrary. He was more given to deal with things, whether pleasant or painful, in a practical manner by daylight, than to rack his brains with them at night. Therefore, the way in which the new doubt troubled him, when he lay in bed that night, was something wonderful. Had he been a fanciful woman, he could not have experienced worse treatment from his imagination. It was running riot within him. Could it be that the money intrusted to him was gone?—lost?—Had he put it into that bank for safety, only to find that the bank would never refund it again? How was he to make it good? He could not make it good, and the little Chisholms, the children of his dead friend, must be beggars! He thought not of his own money, lodged in the care of Godolphin, Crosse, and Godolphin; that seemed as nothing in comparison with this. Mr. Hastings had had rather an expensive family; he had given money away in his parish,—a conscientious clergyman is obliged to give, more or less,—and his savings, all told, did not amount to more than two thousand pounds. It was not of that, equally at stake, that he thought, but of this other and larger sum, of which he was but the steward.

Try as he would, he could not get

to sleep; try as he would, he could not put these half-insane visions from him. His mind became wrought to the very highest pitch; he could have found in his heart to get up, make his way to the bank, knock up George Godolphin, and demand his money back again. He registered a silent resolve that he would go there with the first glimmer of morning light. Yesterday he was a free man, a man at his ease, it may be said a prosperous man: to-morrow, should that money be beyond his reach, he would be ruined forever,—broken down under his weight of care. What if he were too late! If he went to the bank, and was told, "The bank is in embarrassment, and we cannot refund?" Oh, how supinely careless had he been, to suffer a whole day to slip on since Isaac's warning! Any hour in that past day he might have gone and withdrawn the money,—might have had it securely now in the chest by his bedside. When another dawned, it might be too late.

Torments such as these,—and they were all the more intolerable from the fact of his being unused to them,—haunted him through the night. They have haunted us; they, or similar ones. Towards morning, he dropped into a heavy sleep, awaking later than his customary hour. Those dark visions were gone then; but enough of their effect remained to keep the rector to his resolve of drawing out the money. "I'll go the first thing after breakfast," said he, as he dressed himself.

But, when breakfast was over, and the business of the day fairly entered upon, Mr. Hastings felt half ashamed of his resolution. The visions of the night appeared to him to be simply fantastic follies, diseased creations of the brain: should there be really no cause for his withdrawal of the money, how worse than foolish he should look!—nay, how unjustifiable would such a procedure be!

What ought he to do? He leaned over the gate while he took counsel with himself. He had put on his hat

and taken his stick in his hand, and gone forth? and there he stopped, hesitating. A strange frame of mind for Mr. Hastings, who was not a vacillating nature. Suddenly he flung the gate open and went through with a decisive step; his determination was taken. He would steer a mid-way course, present himself to his son-in-law, George Godolphin, and ask him frankly, as a friend and relative, whether the money was safe.

Many a one would have decided that it was a safe and proper course to pursue. Mr. Hastings deemed it to be such, and he proceeded to the bank. The fresh air, the bright sun, the pleasant bustle of daily life, had well-nigh dissipated any remaining fears before he got there.

"Can I see Mr. George Godolphin?" he inquired.

"Mr. George is engaged at present, sir," replied the clerk to whom he had addressed himself. "He will be at liberty soon. Would you like to take a seat?"

Mr. Hastings sat down on the chair handed him, and waited; watching at his leisure the business of the bank. Several people were there. Some were paying money in, some drawing it out. There appeared to be no hesitation, either in paying or receiving; all seemed as usual. One man brought a cheque for nine hundred and odd pounds, and it was counted out to him. "I feel sure it is all right," was the conclusion come to by Mr. Hastings.

About ten minutes and George Godolphin came forward. "Ah! is it you?" said he, with his sunny smile. "You are here early this morning."

"I want to say just a word to you in private, Mr. George."

George led the way to his room, talking gayly. He pushed a chair to Mr. Hastings, and took his own. Never a face more free from care than his; never a less troubled eye. He asked after Mrs. Hastings, he asked after Reginald, who was daily expected home from a voyage,—whether he had arrived. "Maria dreamt last night that he had come home," said

he, laughing, "and told her he was never going to sea again."

Mr. Hastings remembered his dreams,—if dreams they could be called. He was beginning to think that he must have had the nightmare.

"Mr. George, I have come to you upon a strange errand," he began. "Will you for a few moments regard me as a confidential friend, and treat me as such?"

"I hope it is what I always do, sir," was the reply of George Godolphin.

"Ay; but I want a proof of your friendship this morning. But for my being connected with you by close ties, I should not have so come. Tell me, honestly and confidentially, as between man and man,—Is that trust-money safe?"

George looked at Mr. Hastings, his countenance slightly changing. Mr. Hastings thought he was vexed.

"I do not understand you," he said.

"I have heard a rumor—I have heard, in fact, two rumors,—that— The long and the short of it is this," more rapidly continued Mr. Hastings, "I have heard that there's something doubtful arising with the bank."

"What on earth do you mean?" uttered George Godolphin.

"Is there any thing the matter? Or is the bank as solvent as it ought to be?"

"I should be sorry to think it otherwise," replied George. "I don't understand you. What have you heard?"

"Just what I tell you. A friend spoke to me in private yesterday, when I was at Bingham, saying that he had heard a suspicion of something being wrong with the bank here. You will not be surprised, Mr. George, that I thought of the nine thousand pounds I had just paid in."

"Who said it?" asked George. "I'll prosecute him if I can find out."

"I dare say you would. But I have not come here to make mischief. I stopped his repeating it, and I, you know, am safe, so there's no harm done. I have passed an uneasy night,

and I have come to ask you to tell me the truth in all good faith."

"The bank is all right," said George. "I cannot imagine how such a report could by any possibility have arisen," he continued, quitting the one point for the other. "There is no foundation for it."

George Godolphin spoke in all good faith when he said he could not tell how the report could have arisen. He really could not. Nothing had transpired at Prior's Ash to give rise to it. Possibly he deemed, in his sanguine temperament, that he spoke in equally good faith, when assuring Mr. Hastings that the bank was all right: he may have believed that it would so continue.

"The money is safe, then?"

"Perfectly safe."

"Otherwise, you must let me have it out now. Were it to be lost, it would be ruin to me, ruin to the little Chisholms."

"But it is safe," returned George, all the more emphatically, because that it would have been remarkably inconvenient, for special reasons, to refund it then to Mr. Hastings. I repeat, that he may have thought it was safe: safe in so far as that the bank would get along somehow, and could repay it sometime. Meanwhile, the use of it was convenient,—how convenient none knew, save George.

"A packet of deeds has been mislaid; or is missing in some way," resumed George. "They belong to Lord Averil. It must be some version of that which has got abroad,—if any thing has got abroad."

"Ay," nodded Mr. Hastings. The opinion coincided precisely with what he had expressed to the agent.

"I know of nothing else wrong with the bank," spoke George. "Some wiseacre has got hold of the wrong pig by the tail. Were you to ask my brother, I am sure he would tell you that business was never more flourishing. I wish to goodness people could be compelled to concern themselves with their own affairs instead of inventing falsehoods of their friends!"

Mr. Hastings rose. "Your assurance is sufficient, Mr. George; I do not require your brother's word to confirm it. I have asked it of you, in all dependence, Maria being the link between us."

"To be sure," replied George; and he shook Mr. Hastings's hand as he went out.

George remained alone, biting the end of his quill-pen. To hear that any such rumor was abroad vexed and annoyed him beyond measure. He only hoped that it would not spread. Some wiseacre—as he called it—must have picked up an inkling about the deed, and converted it into a slur upon the bank's solvency. "I wish I could hang the fools!" muttered George.

His wish was interrupted. Somebody came in and said that Mr. Barnaby desired to see him.

"Let him come in," said George.

Mr. Barnaby came in. A simple-looking man of quiet manners, a corn and barley-dealer, who kept an account at the bank. He had a canvas bag in his hand. George asked him to a seat.

"I was going to pay in two thousand pounds, sir," said he, slightly lifting the bag to indicate that the money was there. "But I'd like, first of all, to be assured that it's all right."

George sat and stared at him. Was Prior's Ash all going mad together? George honestly believed that nothing yet had transpired, or could have transpired, to set these doubts afloat. "Really, Mr. Barnaby, I do not understand you," he said, with some hauteur: just like he had answered Mr. Hastings.

"I called in at Rutt's, sir, as I came along, to know what had been done in that business where I was chiseled out of that load of barley, and I happened to mention that I was coming on here to pay in two thousand pounds. 'Take care that it's all right,' said Rutt. 'I heard the bank talked about yesterday.' Is it all right, sir?"

"It is as right as the Bank of Eng-

land," impulsively answered George. "Rutt shall be brought to account for this."

"Well, I thought it was odd if there *was* any thing up. Then I may leave it with safety?"

"Yes, you may," replied George. "Have you not always found it safe hitherto?"

"That's just it: I couldn't fancy that any thing wrong had come to it all on a sudden. I'll go and pay it in then, sir. It won't be for long, though. I shall be wanting it out, I expect, by the end of next week."

"Whenever you please, Mr. Barnaby," replied George.

The corn-dealer retired to leave his money, and George Godolphin sat on alone, biting his pen as before. Where could these pernicious rumors have had their rise? Harmless enough they might have fallen, had nothing been rotten at the core of affairs: George alone knew how awfully pernicious they might prove now, did they get wind.

CHAPTER XLI.

MR. LAYTON "LOOKED UP."

If this mysterious loss of the packet of deeds disturbed Thomas Godolphin, it was also disturbing, in no light degree, the faithful old clerk, Mr. Hurde. Never, since he had entered the house of Godolphin, Crosse, and Godolphin—so many years ago now, that he had almost lost count of them—had any similar unsatisfactory incident occurred. Mr. Hurde thought and thought and thought it over: he turned it about in his mind, he looked at it in all its bearings. He came to the conclusion that it must be one of two things: either that George Godolphin had inadvertently misplaced it, or that it had been stolen out and out. George Godolphin said that he had not misplaced it; indeed, George did not

acknowledge to any recollection of having visited at all the box of Lord Averil, except when he went to make the search: and Mr. Godolphin had now looked in every box that the safe contained, and could not find it. Therefore, after much vacillating between opinions, the clerk came to the final conclusion that the deeds had been taken.

"Who could have done it?" he asked himself over and over again. Somebody about them, doubtless. He believed all the clerks were safe; that is, honest; save Layton. Until this happened, he would have said Layton was safe; and it was only in the utter absence of any other quarter for suspicion that he cast a doubt on Layton. Of the clerks, he felt least sure of Layton: but that was the utmost that could be said: he would not have thought to doubt the man, but that he was seeking for somebody to lay it on. The deeds could not have gone without hands, and Mr. Hurde, in his perplexity, could only think that Layton's hands were less unlikely hands than others.

On the previous evening, he had gone home thinking of it. And there he pondered the affair over, while he digested his dry toast and his milkless tea. He was a man of very spare habits; partly that his health compelled him to be so; partly from a parsimonious nature. While seated at it, composedly enjoying the ungenerous fare near the open window, who should he see go by, but the very man on whom his thoughts were fixed,—Layton. This Layton was a young, good-looking man, an inveterate dandy, with curls and a moustache. That moustache, sober, clean-shaved Mr. Hurde had always looked askance upon. That Layton had been given to spend more than was expedient, Prior's Ash knew: but for that fact, he would not now have been a banker's clerk. His family were respectable—wealthy in a moderate way; but he had run through too much of their money and tired them out. For the last two or three

years he had settled down to sobriety. Thomas Godolphin had admitted him to a clerkship in his house, and Layton had married, and appeared content to live in a small way.

A small way for him; as compared to what he had been accustomed to; too large a way in the opinion of Mr. Hurde. Mrs. Layton had a piano, and played and sang very much, for the benefit of the passers-by; and Layton hired gigs on a Sunday and drove her out. Great food for Mr. Hurde's censure, and he was thinking of all this when Layton passed. Starting up with a bound to look after him, he nearly upset his teaboard.

He, Layton, was walking arm-in-arm with a Mr. Jolly,—a great sporting character. Mr. Hurde gave a grunt of dissatisfaction. "Much good it will bring him if he gets intimate with him!"

In the dark of the evening, when it had grown quite late, and Mr. Hurde had taken his frugal supper, he went out, and bent his steps towards the residence of Layton. In his present uncertain frame of mind, touching Layton, it seemed expedient to Mr. Hurde to take a walk past his place of abode, lest haply he might come upon something or other confirmatory of his suspicions.

And he did. At least, it appeared to Hurde that he did. Never a shade of doubt rested upon him that night that the thief was Ned Layton.

On the high road, going to Ashlydyat,—not the obscure and less frequented way down Crosse Street, but the open turnpike road taken by carriages,—there had been a good deal of building of late years. Houses and terraces had grown up, almost as by magic, not only along the line of road, but branching off on either side of it. Down one of these turnings, a row of dwellings of that class called in the local phraseology "genteel," had been erected by a fancy architect. He had certainly not displayed any great amount of judicious skill. They contained eight rooms, had glittering white fronts and grass-green porticos

of trellis-work. White houses are very nice, and there's nothing objectionable in green porticos: but they need not be made to abut right upon the public pathway. Walking in front of the terrace, the porticos looked like so many green watch-boxes, and the bow-windows appeared to be constituted on purpose that you should see what was inside them. In the last house of this row dwelt the clerk, Layton. He and his wife had lodgings in it: that bow-windowed parlor and the bedroom over it.

Mr. Hurde strolled past, in the deliberate manner that he might have done had he been out for only an evening airing, and he obtained full view of the interior of the sitting-room. He obtained the pleasure of a very full view indeed. In fact, there appeared to be so much to look at, that his vision at first could but take it in confusedly.

The Laytons had got a party. Two or three ladies, and two or three gentlemen. A supper-tray was at one end of the table, and at this end, next the window, were two decanters of wine, some fruit and biscuits. There was a great deal of talking and laughing and there was plenty of light. Four candles Mr. Hurde counted as he stood there: two on the table, two on the mantelpiece. Four candles! and they were not staid respectable "moulds," like *he* burnt, but those flaring dropping composites, tenpence a pound, if they were a penny! He, the old clerk, stood there, unseen and unsuspected, and took it all in. The display of glass looked something profuse, and he nearly gave vent to a groan when he caught sight of the silver forks: silver or imitation, he did not know which, but it appeared all one to Mr. Hurde. *He* had never overstepped the respectable customs of his forefathers,—had never advanced beyond the good old-fashioned two-pronged steel fork. They were sitting with the window open; no houses were as yet built opposite, and the road was not invaded, save by persons coming to these houses, from

one hour's end to another. Mr. Hurde could stand there, and enjoy the sight at leisure. If ever a man felt conviction rush to his heart, he did then. Wine, and composite candles, and silver forks, and supper, and visitors!—who but Layton could have taken the deed?

He stood there a little too long. Falling into a reverie, he did not notice a movement within, and suffered himself to be all but dropped upon. He could have made an excuse, it is true; for Layton was a civil fellow, and had several times asked him to go up there; but he preferred not to make it, and not to be seen. The street-door opened, and Mr. Hurde had just time to dart past the portico and take shelter behind it, round the corner. From his position he was within hearing of any thing that might be said.

The sporting character with whom he had seen Layton walking early in the evening, and who made one of the guests, had come forth to depart. Layton had attended him to the door; and they stood inside the portico, talking. In Mr. Hurde's fluster, he did not at first catch the sense of the words; but he soon found it related to horse-racing.

"You back Cannonbar," said the sporting man. "You can't be far out then. He's a first-rate horse; he'll beat the whole field into next week. You were in luck to draw him."

"I have backed him," replied Layton.

"Back him again: he's a little gold mine. I'd spend a fifty-pound note on him, I would."

Layton answered by a laugh. They shook hands, and the sporting friend, who appeared to be in a hurry, set off with a run in the direction of Prior's Ash. Mr. Layton went in again, and shut the door.

Then Mr. Hurde came out of his corner. All his suspicions strengthened. Strengthened? nay; changed into certainties. Plate, glass, composites, wines, supper, and friends at it, had been doubtful enough; but

they were as trifles compared to this new danger,—this betting on the turf. Had he seen Layton take Lord Averil's deeds with his own eyes, he could not have been more certain of his guilt than he felt now.

Enjoying another quiet survey of the room, during which he had the gratification of hearing Mrs. Layton, who had now seated herself at the piano, plunge into a song, which began something about a "bird on the wing," the old clerk, grievously discomfited, retraced his steps past the terrace, picked his way over some clay and loose land in front of another terrace in process of erection, and turned into the high road, leading to Prior's Ash. He was going along lost in thought, when he nearly ran against a gentleman, turning an angle of the road. It was Mr. Godolphin.

"Oh,—I beg your pardon, sir. I did not look where I was going."

"Enjoying an evening's stroll, Hurde?" said Mr. Godolphin, who had been spending an hour with Lord Averil. "It is a beautiful night: so serene and still."

"No, sir, I can't say that I am enjoying it," was Mr. Hurde's reply. "My mind was not at ease as to Layton. I could not help associating him with the loss of the deeds, and I came out, thinking I'd look about a bit. It must have been instinct sent me, for I have had my suspicions confirmed."

"Confirmed in what way?" asked Thomas Godolphin.

"That Layton has had the deeds. It could have been no other."

Thomas Godolphin listened in surprise, not to say incredulity. "How have you had them confirmed?" he inquired, after a pause.

So then the clerk enlarged upon what he had seen. "It could not all come out of his salary, Mr. Godolphin. It does not stand to reason that it could."

"As a daily extravagance, of course it could not, Hurde," was the reply. "But it may be but a chance entertainment?"

Mr. Hurde slipped the question: possibly he felt that he could not debate it. "And the betting?—the risking money upon race-horses, sir?"

"Ah! I like that less," readily acknowledged Thomas Godolphin. "Many a clerk of far higher pecuniary position than Layton has been ruined by it."

"And sent across the herring-pond to expiate his folly," returned Mr. Hurde, whom the mention of "backing" and other such incentive temptations was wont to exasperate in no measured degree. "I am afraid it looks pretty plain, sir."

"I don't know," said Thomas Godolphin, musingly. "I cannot think Layton has become a rogue. I see nothing inconsistent,—with all due respect to your opinion, Hurde,—I see nothing inconsistent in his entertaining a few friends occasionally. But—without any reference to our loss—if he is turning, or has turned a betting-man, it must be looked after. We will have none such in the bank."

"No, sir. It would not do at any price," acquiesced Mr. Hurde. "Are you feeling pretty well, sir, this evening?" he inquired, as Mr. Godolphin was preparing to continue his road.

"Quite well. I have not been so well a long time, as I have been the last few days. Good-night, Hurde."

It seemed that Mr. Hurde was fated that night to come into contact with his principals. Who should overtake him, just as he had come to the spot where the houses were thick, but Mr. George Godolphin. George slackened his steps,—he had been walking along at a striding pace,—and kept by his side. He began speaking of the hay and other indifferent topics: but Mr. Hurde's mind was not attuned to such, that night.

"I think I have solved the mystery, Mr. George," began he.

"What mystery?" asked George.

"The stealing of Lord Averil's bonds. I know who took them."

George turned his head sharply

round and looked at him. "What nonsense are you saying now, Hurde?"

"I wish it was nonsense, sir," was the reply of Mr. Hurde. "I am as sure that I know how it was those bonds went, and who took them, as that I am here."

"And whom do you accuse?" asked George, after a pause, speaking somewhat sarcastically.

"Layton."

"Layton?" shouted George, stopping still in his astonishment. "What Layton?"

"What Layton, sir? Why, our clerk, Layton. I ought to have held my doubts of him before; but I suppose I had got dust in my eyes. There are he and his wife entertaining the world; their room crowded; half a score people, pretty nigh, in it, and she, Layton's wife, is sitting down to the piano with pink bows in her head."

"What if she is?" asked George.

"You should see the supper-table, Mr. George," continued Hurde, too much annoyed with his own view of things to answer superfluous questions. "I can't tell what they have not got upon it: silver, and glass, and decanters of wine. That's not got out of his salary. And Layton is taking to betting."

"But what about the bonds?" impatiently questioned George.

"Why—are not these so many proofs that Layton must have taken the bonds and made money of them, sir? Where else could he get the means from? I have imparted my suspicions to Mr. Godolphin, and I expect he will follow them up, and have it fully investigated."

"Then you are a fool for your pains, Hurde!" retorted George, in anger. "Layton no more took—I dare say Layton no more took those bonds than you did. You'll get into trouble, if you don't mind."

"What, sir?" uttered Hurde, aghast.

"That," curtly answered George, "if you 'follow up' any chimera that your brain chooses to raise, you must expect to get paid out for it. Let

Layton alone. It will be time enough to look him up when suspicious circumstances arise to implicate him. The bonds are gone: but we shall not get them back again by making a stir in wrong quarters. The better plan will be to keep quiet over it for a while."

He resumed his quick pace and strode along, calling back a good-night to Mr. Hurde. The latter gazed after him in undisguised astonishment.

"Make no stir! let the thing go on quietly!" he articulated to himself. "Who'd say such a thing but easy George Godolphin? Not look up Layton? It's well for you, Mr. George, that you have got men of business about you! He'd let himself be robbed under his very nose, and never look out to see who did it. How ever will things go on if the worst happens to his brother?"

It seemed that they were all saying the same,—how ever would things go on if the worst happened to Thomas Godolphin.

For once in his life of service the old clerk chose to ignore the wish—the command, if you will—of Mr. George Godolphin. He did *not* let Layton alone. Quite the contrary. No sooner did Layton enter the bank on the following morning than Mr. Hurde dropped upon him. He had been watching for his entrance the last ten minutes; for Mr. Layton arrived late, the result possibly of the past night's extensive scene of revelry. He had taken off his hat and settled himself in his place behind the counter, when the chief clerk's voice arrested him.

"I want you, Layton."

Now, the fact was, Mr. Hurde, having slept upon the matter, arose, perplexed by sundry doubts. The circumstances against Layton appeared by no means so conclusive to his mind as they had done the previous night. Therefore he deemed it good policy to speak to that suspected gentleman in a temperate spirit, and see whether he could fish any thing out,

rather than to accuse him point-blank of having been the delinquent.

"This is a nasty business," began he, when Layton reached him, in answer to his call.

"What is?" asked Layton.

"What is!" repeated Mr. Hurde, believing that the loss must have affected everybody connected with the establishment as it was affecting him, and doubting whether the indifferent answer was not a negative proof of guilt. "What should be, but this loss that has been spoken of in the bank?"

"Oh, that," returned Layton. "I dare say it will be found."

"It places us all in a very awkward position, from myself downwards," went on Hurde, who was by no means a conjurer at the task he had undertaken. "There's no knowing what or whom Mr. Godolphin's suspicions may be turning to."

"Rubbish!" retorted Layton. "It's not probable Mr. Godolphin would begin to doubt any of us. There's no cause."

"I don't know that," said Mr. Hurde, significantly. "I am not so sure of some of you."

Layton opened his eyes. He supposed Mr. Hurde must be alluding to some one clerk in particular; must have cause to do it; but he did not glance at himself. "Why do you say that?" he asked.

"Well, it has occurred to me that some one or two of you may be living at a rate that your salary would neither pay for nor justify. You for one."

"I?" returned Layton.

"Yes, you. Horses, and gigs, and wine, and company, and pianos. They can't be managed out of a hundred a year."

Layton was taken rather aback. Not to make an unnecessary mystery over it, it may as well be mentioned that all these expenses which so troubled old Hurde, the clerk was really paying for honestly. But not out of the salary. An uncle of his

wife's was allowing them an addition to their income, and this supplied the extra luxuries. He resented the insinuation.

"Whether they are managed out of it, or whether they are not, is no business of yours, Mr. Hurde," he said, after a pause. "I shall not come to you to pay for them, or to the bank either."

"It is my business," replied the old clerk. "It is Mr. Godolphin's business, which is the same thing. Pray, how long since is it that you have become a betting man?"

"I am not a betting man," said Layton.

"Oh, indeed! You have not bet upon Cannonbar, I suppose? You never put into a sweepstakes in your life?—you are not in any now, are you?"

Layton could only open his mouth in astonishment. He thought nothing less but that the spirits,—then in the height of fashion,—must have been at work. He was really no betting man; had never been inclined that way; but latterly, to oblige some friend, who bothered him over it, he had gone into a sweepstakes and drawn the renowned horse, Cannonbar. And had followed it up by betting a pound upon him.

"You see, Mr. Layton, your pursuits are not quite so inexpensively simple as you would wish to make them appear. These things happen to have come to my knowledge, and I have thought it my duty to mention them to Mr. Godolphin."

Layton flew into a gust of passion. Partly in the soreness of feeling at having been so closely looked after; partly in anger that dishonesty could be associated with him; and chiefly at hearing that he had been so obnoxiously reported to Mr. Godolphin. "Have you told him," he foamed, "that you suspect me of robbing the strong-room?"

"Somebody has robbed it," was Mr. Hurde's rejoinder. "And has no doubt made money of the deeds he stole."

"I ask you if you have told Mr.

Godolphin that you cast this suspicion to me?" reiterated Layton, stamping his foot.

"What if I have? Appearances, in my opinion, would warrant my casting it to you."

"Then you had better cast it to Mr. George Godolphin. There!"

But they were completely absorbed in the dispute, their voices raised to a high pitch,—at least Layton's,—they might have seen Mr. Godolphin close to them. In passing through the bank from his carriage to his private room, for, in the untoward state of affairs, touching the loss, he had come betimes,—he was attracted by the angry sounds, and turned towards them.

"Is any thing the matter?"

They looked round, saw Mr. Godolphin, and their voices and their tempers alike dropped to a calm. Neither appeared inclined to answer the proffered question, and Mr. Godolphin passed on. Another minute or two, and a message came from him, commanding the presence of the chief clerk.

"Hurde," he began, "have you been speaking to Layton of what you mentioned to me last night?"

"Yes, sir, that's what it was. It put him in a passion."

"He disclaims the suspicion, I suppose?"

"Out-and-out, sir," was the answer of Mr. Hurde. "He says his wife has an income independent of himself, and that he put into a sweepstakes lately to oblige a friend, and staked a sovereign on the horse he drew. He says it is all he ever staked in his life, and all he ever meant to stake. He was saying this when you sent for me. I don't know what to think. He speaks honest enough to listen to him."

"What remark did I hear him making relative to Mr. George Godolphin?"

"He ought to be punished for that," replied Mr. Hurde. "Better suspect Mr. George than suspect him, was what he said. I don't know what he meant, and I don't think he knew himself, sir."

"Why did he say it?"

"When men are beside themselves with passion, sir, they say any thing that comes uppermost. They are not nice to a shade. I asked him, after you went, what he meant by it, but he would not say any more."

"I think you must be mistaken in suspecting Layton, Hurde. I thought so last night."

"Well, sir, maybe I am," acknowledged Hurde. "I don't feel so sure of it as I did. But then comes the old puzzle back again as to who could have taken the deeds. Layton would not have been so fierce but that he found the doubt had been mentioned to you," added Mr. Hurde, returning to the subject of the clerk's explosion of anger.

"Did you tell him you had mentioned it?"

"Yes, sir, I did. It's not my way to hide faults in a corner; and that the clerks know."

Mr. Godolphin dropped the subject, and entered upon some general business. The old clerk remained with him about ten minutes, and then was at liberty to withdraw.

"Send Layton to me," was the order as he went out. And the clerk, Layton, appeared in obedience to it.

Thomas Godolphin received him kindly, his manner and words had all the repose of quiet confidence. He believed Mr. Hurde to be completely mistaken, to have erred through zeal, and he intimated as much to Layton. He might not have personally entered on the topic with him, but for Layton's hearing that he had been accused to him.

Layton's heart opened to his master. He was a good-dispositioned man when not exasperated. He frankly volunteered to Mr. Godolphin the amount total of his wife's income and its source; he stated that he was not living by one penny more than he could afford; and he distinctly denied being a betting man, either by practice or inclination,—save for the one bet of a pound, which he had made incidentally. Altogether, his explana-

tion was perfectly satisfactory to Mr. Godolphin.

"Understand me, Layton, I did not, myself, cast the slightest doubt upon you. To do so, never occurred to me."

"I hope not, sir," was Layton's reply. "Mr. Hurde has his crotchets, and we, who are under him, must put up with them. His bark is worse than his bite,—that much may be said."

"Yes?" said Thomas Godolphin. "You might fare worse in that respect than you do under Mr. Hurde. What was the meaning of the words you spoke, relative to Mr. George Godolphin?"

Layton felt that his face was on fire. He muttered, in his confusion, something to the effect that it was a "slip of the tongue."

"But you must be aware that such slips are entirely unjustifiable. Some cause must have induced you to say it. What may it have been?"

"The truth is, sir, I was in a passion when I said it," replied Layton, compelled to speak. "I am very sorry."

"You are evading my question," quietly replied Thomas Godolphin. "I ask you what could have induced you to say it. There must have been something to lead to the remark."

"I did not mean any thing, I declare to you, sir. Mr. Hurde vexed me by casting the suspicion upon me; and, in the moment's anger, I retorted that he might as well cast it upon Mr. George Godolphin."

Thomas Godolphin pressed the question. In Layton's voice, when he had uttered it, distorted though it was with passion, his ears had detected a strange sound of meaning. "But why upon Mr. George Godolphin? Why more upon him than any other?—upon myself, for instance; or Mr. Hurde?"

Layton was silent. Thomas Godolphin waited, his serene countenance fixed upon the clerk's.

"I suppose I must have had in my head a remark I heard yesterday,

sir," he slowly rejoined. "Heaven knows, though, I paid no heed to it; and how I came to forget myself so in my passion, I don't know. I am sure I thought nothing of it, afterwards, until Mr. Hurde spoke to me this morning."

"What was the remark?" asked Mr. Godolphin.

"Sir, it was that sporting man, Jolly, who said it. He fastened himself on me last evening, in going from here, and I could not get rid of him until ten at night. We were talking about different things,—the great discount houses in London, and one thing or other; and he said, incidentally, that Mr. George Godolphin had got a good deal of paper in the market."

Thomas Godolphin paused. "Did he assert that he knew this?"

"He was pretending to assert many things, as of his own knowledge. I asked him how he knew it, and he replied a friend of his had seen it,—meaning the paper. It was all he said; and how I came to repeat such a thing after him, I cannot tell. I hope you will excuse it, sir."

"I cannot help excusing it," replied Mr. Godolphin. "You said the thing, and you cannot unsay it. It was very wrong. Take care that you do not give utterance to it again."

Layton withdrew, inwardly vowing that he never would. In point of fact, he had not attached much credence to the information; and could now have bitten his tongue out for repeating it. He wondered whether they could prosecute him for slander; or whether, if it came to the ears of Mr. George, they would. Mr. Godolphin had met it with the considerate generosity ever characteristic of him; but Mr. George was different from his brother. If ever a man in this world lived up to the divine command, "Do as ye would be done by," that man was Thomas Godolphin.

But the words, nevertheless, had grated on Thomas Godolphin's ears. That George was needlessly lavish in expenditure, he knew: but not more so than his income allowed, did he

choose to spend it all,—unless he had secret sources of expense. A flush came over Thomas Godolphin's face as the idea suggested itself to his mind. Once in the train of thought, he could not stop it. *Had* George private valves for expenditure, of which the world knew nothing? Could he have been using the bank's money?—could it be he who had taken Lord Averil's deeds? Like unto Isaac Hastings, the red flush of shame dyed Thomas's brow at the thought,—shame for his own obtrusive imagination, that could conjure up such things of his brother. Thomas had never conjured them up, but for the suggestion gratuitously imparted to him by Layton.

But he could not drive it down. No; like the vision which had been gratuitously presented to the Reverend Mr. Hastings, and which he had been unable to lay, Thomas Godolphin could not drive it down. In a sort of panic—a panic caused by his own thoughts—he called for certain of the books to be brought to him.

Some of those wanted were in George Godolphin's room. It was Isaac Hastings who was sent in there for them.

"The books!" exclaimed George, looking at Isaac.

"Mr. Godolphin wants them, sir."

It was entirely out of the common for these books to come under the inspection (unless at periodical times) of Mr. Godolphin. The very asking for them implied a doubt on George—at least, it sounded so to that gentleman's all-conscious ears. He pointed out the books to Isaac, in silence, with the feather-end of his pen.

Isaac Hastings carried them to Mr. Godolphin, and left them with him. Mr. Godolphin turned them rapidly over and over: they appeared, so far as he could see at a cursory glance, to be all right; the balance on the credit side weighty, the available funds next door to inexhaustible, the bank altogether flourishing. Thomas took greater shame to himself for having doubted his brother. While thus engaged, an observation suddenly struck

him,—that all the entries were in George's handwriting. A few minutes subsequent to this, George came into the room.

"George," he exclaimed, "how industrious you have become!"

"Industrious?" repeated George, looking round for an explanation.

"All these entries are yours. Formerly you would not have done as much in a year."

George laughed. "I had used to be incorrigibly idle. It was well to turn over a new leaf."

He—George—was going out of the room again, but his brother stopped him. "Stay here, George. I want you."

Mr. Godolphin pointed to a chair as he spoke, and George sat down in it. George, who seemed rather inclined to have the fidgets, took out his penknife and began cutting at an offending nail.

"Are you in any embarrassment, George?"

"In embarrassment? I! Oh dear no."

Thomas paused. Dropping his voice, he resumed in a lower tone, but just removed from a whisper:

"Have you paper flying about the discount markets?"

George Godolphin's fair face grew scarlet. Was it with conscious emotion?—or with virtuous indignation? Thomas assumed it to be the latter. How could he give it an opposite meaning from the indignant words which it accompanied. A burst of indignation which Thomas stopped.

"Stay, George. There is no necessity to put yourself out. I never supposed it to be any thing but false when the rumor of it reached my ear. Only tell me the truth quietly."

Possibly George would have been glad to tell the truth, and get so much of the burden off his mind. But he did not dare. He might have shrunk from the terrible confession at any time to his kind, his good, his upright brother: but things had become too bad to be told to him now. If the exposure did come, why it must, and there

would be no help for it: tell him voluntarily, he could not. By some great giant strokes of luck and policy, it might be averted yet: how necessary, then, to keep it from Thomas Godolphin!

"The truth is," said George, "that I don't know what you mean. To what rumor are you alluding?"

"It has been said that you have a good deal of paper in the market. The report was spoken, and it reached my ears."

"It's not true. It's all an invention," cried George, vehemently. "Should I be such a fool? There are some people who live, it's my belief, by striving to work ill to others. Mr. Hastings was with me this morning. He had heard a rumor that something was wrong with the bank."

"With the bank! In what way?"

"Oh, of course, people must have gathered a version of the loss here, and interpreted it after their own charitable opinions," replied George, returning to his usual careless mode of speech. "The only plan is to laugh at them."

"As you can at the rumor regarding you and the bills?" remarked Thomas.

"As I can, and do," answered easy George. Never more easy, more apparently free from care than in that moment. Thomas Godolphin, truthful himself, open as the day, not glancing to the possibility that George could be deliberately otherwise, felt all his confidence come back to him. George went out, and Thomas turned to the books again.

Yes. They were all in order, all right. With those flourishing statements before him, how could he have been so foolish as to cast a suspicion to George? Thomas had a pen in one hand, and the forefinger of the other pointed to the page, when his face went white as of one in mortal agony, and the drops of moisture oozed out upon his brow.

The same pain, which had taken him occasionally before, had come again. Mortal agony in verity it

seemed. He dropped the pen; he lay back in his chair; he thought he must have fallen to the ground. How long he so lay he could not quite tell; not very long probably, counting by minutes; but counting by pain long enough for a lifetime. Isaac Hastings, coming in with a message, found him. Isaac stood aghast.

"I am not very well, Isaac. Give me your arm. I will go and sit awhile in the dining-room."

"Shall I run over for Mr. Snow, sir?"

"No. I shall be better soon. In fact, I am better; or I could not talk to you. It was a sudden pain."

He leaned upon Isaac Hastings, and gained the dining-room. It was empty. Isaac left him there, and proceeded, unordered, to acquaint Mr. George Godolphin. He could not find him.

"Mr. George is gone out," said a clerk. "Not two minutes ago."

"I had better tell Maria, then," thought Isaac. "He does not look fit to be left alone."

Speeding up the stairs to Maria's sitting-room, he found her in it, talking to Margery. Miss Meta, in a cool brown-holland dress and a large straw hat, was dancing about in glee. She danced up to him.

"I am going to the hayfield to make haycocks," said she. "Will you come?"

"Don't I wish I could!" he replied, catching her up. "It is fine to be Miss Meta Godolphin! to have nothing to do all day but roll in the hay."

She struggled to get down. Margery was waiting to depart. A terrible thing if Margery should have all the rolling to herself and Meta be left behind! They went out, and he turned to his sister.

"Maria, Mr. Godolphin is in the dining-room, ill. I thought I'd come and tell you. He looks too ill to be left."

"What is the matter with him?" she asked.

"A sudden pain," he said. "I happened to go into his room with a message, and saw him. I thought he was dead at first; he looked so ghastly."

Maria hastened down-stairs. Thomas, better then, but looking fearfully ill still, leaned upon the arm of a couch. Maria went up and took his hand.

"Oh, Thomas, you do look ill! What is it?"

He gazed into her face with a serene countenance, a quiet smile. "It is only another of my warnings, Maria. I have been so much better that I am not sure but I thought they were gone for good."

Maria drew forward a chair and sat down by him. "Warnings?" she repeated.

"Of the end. You must be aware, Maria, that I am attacked with a fatal malady."

Maria was not entirely unaware of it, but she had never understood that the fatal termination was inevitable. She did not know but he might live to be an old man. "Can nothing be done for you?" she breathed.

"Nothing."

Her eyes glistened with the rising tears. "Oh, Thomas! you must not die! We could none of us bear to lose you. George could not do without you; Janet could not; I think I could not."

He gently shook his head. "We may not pick and choose, Maria,—who shall stop here, and who be taken. Those go sometimes who, seemingly, can be least best spared."

She could scarcely speak; afraid lest the sobs should come, for her heart was aching. "But surely it is not to be speedy?" she murmured. "You may live on a long while yet?"

"The doctors tell me I may live on for years, if I keep myself tranquil. I think they are wrong."

"Oh, then, Thomas, you surely will!" she eagerly said, her cheek flushing with emotion. "Who can have tranquillity if you cannot?"

How ignorant they both were of the black cloud looming right overhead, ready then to burst, and send forth its sweeping torrent! Tranquillity! Tranquillity! henceforth for Thomas Godolphin.

CHAPTER XLII.

GONE!

THE days passed on to a certain Saturday. An ominous Saturday for the family of the Godolphins. Rising rumors, vague at the best, and therefore all the more dangerous, had been spreading in Prior's Ash and its neighborhood. Some said the bank had had a loss; some said the bank was creachy; some said Mr. George Godolphin had been lending out money from the bank's funds; some said their London agents had failed; some actually said that Thomas Godolphin was dead. The various phases that the rumors took were something extravagantly marvellous: but the whole, combined, whispered ominously of danger. Only let public fear be thoroughly aroused, and it would be all over. It was as a train of powder laid, which only wants one touch of a lighted match to set it exploding.

Remittances arrived on the Saturday morning, in the ordinary course of business. Valuable remittances. Sufficient for the usual routine of business: but not sufficient for any unusual routine. On the Friday afternoon a somewhat untoward incident had occurred. A stranger presented himself at the bank and demanded to see Mr. George Godolphin. The clerk to whom he addressed himself left him standing at the counter, and went away,—to acquaint, as the stranger supposed, Mr. George Godolphin: but, in point of fact, the clerk was not sure whether Mr. George was in or out. Finding he was out, he told Mr. Hurde, who went forward: and was taken by the stranger for Mr. George Godolphin. Not personally knowing (as it would appear) Mr. George Godolphin, it was a natural enough mistake. A staid man, looking like a gentleman, with staid spectacles, might well be supposed by a stranger to be one of the firm.

"I have got a claim upon you," said the stranger, drawing a piece of

paper out of his pocket. "Will you be so good as settle it?"

Mr. Hurde took the paper and glanced over it. It was an accepted bill, George Godolphin's name to it.

"I cannot say any thing about this," Mr. Hurde was beginning: but the applicant interrupted him.

"I don't want any thing *said*. I want it paid."

"You should have heard me out," rejoined Mr. Hurde. "I cannot say or do any thing in this myself: you must see Mr. George Godolphin. He is out, but——"

"Come, none of that gammon!" interposed the stranger again, who appeared to have come prepared to enter upon contests. "I was warned there'd be a bother over it: that Mr. George Godolphin would deny himself, and say black was white if necessary. You can't do *me*, Mr. George Godolphin."

"You are not taking me for Mr. George Godolphin!" exclaimed the old clerk, uncertain whether to believe his ears.

"Yes I am taking you for Mr. George Godolphin," doggedly returned the man. "Will you take up this bill?"

"I am *not* Mr. George Godolphin. Mr. George Godolphin will be in presently, and you can see him."

"It's a do," cried the stranger. "I want this paid. I know the claims there are against Mr. George Godolphin, and I have come all the way from town to enforce mine. I don't want to come in with the ruck of his creditors, who'll get a sixpence in the pound, maybe."

A very charming announcement to be made in a banking-house. The clerks pricked up their ears; the two or three customers who were present turned round from the counters and listened for more; for the civil gentlemen had not deemed it necessary to speak in a subdued tone. Mr. Hurde, scared out of his propriety, in mortal fear lest any thing worse might come, hurried the man to a safe place, and

left him there to await the entrance of Mr. George Godolphin.

Whether this incident, mentioned outside (as it was sure to be), put the finishing touch to the rumors already in circulation, cannot be known. Neither was it known to those interested, what Mr. George did with his loud and uncompromising customer, when he at length entered and admitted him to an interview. It is possible that but for this untoward application, the crash might not have come quite so soon.

Saturday morning rose busily, as was usual at Prior's Ash. However stagnant the town might be on other days, Saturday was always full of life and bustle. Prior's Ash was renowned for its grain market; and dealers from all parts of the country flocked in to attend it. But on this morning some unusual excitement appeared to be stirring the town,—natives and visitors. People stood about in groups, talking, listening, asking questions, consulting: and as the morning hours wore on, an unwonted stream appeared to be setting in towards the house of Godolphin, Crosse, and Godolphin. Whether the reports might be true or false, there'd be no harm just to draw *their* money out, and be on the safe side, was the mental remark made by hundreds. Could put it in again when the storm had blown over,—if it proved to be only a false alarm.

Under these circumstances it was little wonder that the bank was unusually favored with visitors. One strange feature in their application was, that they all wanted to draw out money; not a soul came to pay any in. George Godolphin, fully aware of the state of things, alive to the danger, was present in person, his words gracious, his bearing easy, his smile gay as ever. Only to look at him eased some of them of half their doubt.

But it did not stop their checks, and old Hurde (whatever George may have done) grew white with fear.

"For the love of Heaven, send for

Mr. Godolphin, sir!" he whispered. "We can't go on long at this rate."

"What good can he do?" returned George.

"Mr. George, he *ought* to be sent to,—to be let known what's going on; it is an imperative duty," remonstrated the clerk, in a strangely severe tone. "In fact, sir, if you don't send, I must. I am responsible to him."

"Send, then," said George. "I only thought to spare him vexation."

Mr. Hurde beckoned Isaac Hastings. "Fly for your life up to Ashlydyat and see Mr. Godolphin," he breathed in his ear. "Tell him there's a run upon the bank."

Isaac passing through the bank with apparent unconcern, easy and careless as if he had taken a leaf from the book of George Godolphin, did not let the grass grow under his feet when he was out. But instead of turning towards Ashlydyat, he took the way to All Souls' Rectory.

Getting there panting and breathless, he dashed in, and dashed against his brother Reginald, not five minutes arrived from a two-years' absence at sea. Scarcely affording half a moment to a passing greeting, he was hastening out of the room again in search of his father.

"Do you call *that* a welcome, Isaac?" exclaimed Mrs. Hastings in a surprised and reproving tone. "Where's your hurry? One would think you were upon an errand of life and death."

"So I am: it is little short of it," he replied, in agitation. "Regy, don't stop me: you will know all soon. Is my father in his room?"

"He is gone out," said Mrs. Hastings.

"Gone out!" The words sounded like a knell. Unless his father hastened to the bank, he might be a ruined man. "Where's he gone, mother?"

"My dear, I have not the least idea. What is the matter with you?"

Isaac took one instant's dismayed counsel with himself: he had not time for more. *He* could not go in search of him: he must hasten to

Ashlydyat. He looked up : laid summary hold of his sister Rose, put her outside the door, closed it, and set his back against it.

"Reginald, listen to me. You must go out and find my father. Search for him everywhere. Tell him there's a run upon the bank, and he must be in haste if he would make himself safe. Mother, could you look for him as well? The Chisholms' money is there, you know, and it would be nothing but ruin."

Mrs. Hastings gazed at Isaac with wondering eyes, puzzled with perplexity.

"Don't you understand, mother?" he urged. "I can't look for him : I ought not to have come out of my way as far as here. He must be found, so do your best, Reginald. Of course you will be cautious to say nothing abroad : I put out Rose that she might not hear."

Opening the door again, passing the indignant Rose without so much as a word, Isaac sped across the road, and dashed through some cross-fields and lanes to Ashlydyat. His *détour* had not hindered him above three or four minutes, for he went at the pace of a steam-engine. He considered it—as Hurde had said by Mr. Godolphin—an imperative duty to warn his father. Thomas Godolphin was not up when he got to Ashlydyat. It was only between ten and eleven o'clock.

"I must see him, Miss Godolphin," he said to Janet. "It is imperative."

By words or by actions putting aside obstacles, he stood within Thomas Godolphin's chamber. The latter had passed a night of suffering, its traces remaining on his countenance.

"I shall be down at the bank some time in the course of the day, Isaac ; though I am scarcely equal to it," he observed, as soon as he saw him. "Am I wanted for any thing in particular?"

"I—I—am sent up to tell you bad news, sir," replied Isaac, feeling the communication an unpleasant one to

make. "There's a run upon the bank."

"A run on the bank!" repeated Thomas Godolphin, scarcely believing the information.

Isaac explained. A complete run. For the last hour, ever since the bank opened, people had been thronging in.

Thomas paused. "I cannot imagine what can have led to it," he resumed. "Is my brother visible?"

"Oh yes, sir."

"That is well. He can assure them all that we are solvent,—that there is no fear. Have the remittances come?"

"Yes, sir. But they will be nothing, Mr. Hurde says, with a run like this."

"Be so kind as to touch that bell for me, Isaac, to bring up my servant. I will be at the bank immediately."

Isaac rang the bell, quitted the room, and hastened back. The bank was fuller than ever : and its coffers must be getting low.

"Do you happen to know whether my father has been in?" he whispered to Layton, next to whom he stood.

Layton shook his head to express a negative. "I think not. I have not observed him."

Isaac stood upon thorns. He might not quit his post. Every time the doors swung to and fro—and they were incessantly swinging—he looked for Mr. Hastings. But he looked in vain. By-and-by Mr. Hurde came forward, a note in his hand. "Put on your hat, Layton, and take this round," said he. "Wait for an answer."

"Let me take it," almost shouted Isaac. And, without waiting for assent or dissent, he seized the note from Mr. Hurde's hand, caught up his hat, and was gone. Thomas Godolphin was getting out of his carriage as he passed out.

Isaac had not, this time, to go out of his way. The delivery of the note would necessitate his passing the rectory. "Rose!" he uttered, out of breath with agitation as he had been before, "is papa not in?"

Rose was sitting there alone. "No," she answered. "Mamma and Regi-

nald went out just after you. Where did you send them to?"

"Then they can't find him!" muttered Isaac to himself, speeding off again, and giving Rose no answer. "It will be nothing but ruin."

A few steps farther, and who should he see but his father. The Reverend Mr. Hastings was coming leisurely across the fields, from the very direction which Isaac had previously traveled. He had probably been to the Pollard cottages: he did sometimes take that round. Hedges and ditches were nothing to Isaac in the moment's excitement, and he leaped one of each to get to him: it cut off a step or two.

"Where were you going an hour ago?" called out Mr. Hastings before they met. "You were flying as swift as the wind."

"Oh, father!" wailed out Isaac, "did you see me?"

"What should hinder me? I was at old Satcherly's."

"If you had but come out to me! I would rather have seen you then, than—than heaven," he panted. "There's a run upon the bank. If you don't make haste and draw out your money you'll be too late."

Mr. Hastings laid his hand upon Isaac's arm. It may be that he did not comprehend him; for his utterance was rapid and full of emotion. Isaac, in his impulsive eagerness, shook it off.

"There's not a moment to lose, father. I don't fancy they can keep on paying long. Half the town's there."

Without another word of delay, Mr. Hastings turned and sped along with a step nearly as fleet as Isaac's. When he reached the bank the shutters were being put up.

"The bank has stopped," said an officious bystander to the rector.

It was even so. The bank had stopped. The good old firm of Godolphin, Crosse, and Godolphin had GONE.

CHAPTER XLIII.

MURMURS—AND CURIOUS DOUBTS.

WE hear talk now and again of banks breaking, and we give to the sufferers a passing sympathy; but none can realize the calamity in its full and awful meaning, save those who are eye-witnesses of the distress it entails, or who own, unhappily, a personal share in it. When the Reverend Mr. Hastings walked into the bank of Godolphin, Crosse, and Godolphin, he knew that the closing of the shutters, then in act and process, was the symbol of a fearful misfortune, which would shake to its centre the happy security of Prior's Ash. The thought struck him, even in the midst of his own suspense and perplexity.

One of the first faces he saw was Mr. Hurde's. He made his way to him. "I wish to draw my money out," he said.

The old clerk shook his head. "It's too late, sir."

Mr. Hastings leaned his elbow on the counter, and approached his face nearer to the clerk's. "I don't care (comparatively speaking) for my own money; that which you have held so long; but I must have refunded to me what has been just paid in to my account, but which is none of mine,—the nine thousand pounds."

Mr. Hurde paused ere he replied, as if the words puzzled him. "Nine thousand pounds!" he repeated. "There has been no nine thousand pounds paid in to your account."

"There has," was the reply of Mr. Hastings, given in a sharp, distinct tone. "I paid it in myself, and hold the receipt."

"Well, I don't know," said the clerk, dubiously. "I had your account under my eye this morning, sir, and saw nothing of it. But there's no fear, Mr. Hastings, as I hope and trust," he added, confidentially: "we have telegraphed up for remittances, and expect a messenger down with them before the day's out."

"You are closing the bank," re-

marked Mr. Hastings, in answering argument.

"We are obliged to do that. We had not an ever-perpetual renewing fountain of funds here, and you see how people have been thronging in. On Monday morning I hope the bank will be open again, and in a condition to restore full confidence."

Mr. Hastings felt a slight ray of reassurance. But he would have felt a greater had the nine thousand pounds been handed to him there and then. He said so; in fact, he pressed the matter. How ineffectually, the next words of the clerk told him.

"We have paid away all we had, Mr. Hastings," he whispered. "There's not a penny-piece left in the coffers."

"You have paid the accounts of applicants in full, I presume?"

"Yes: up to the time that our funds in hand lasted to do it."

"Was that just?—to the body of creditors?" asked the rector, in a severe tone.

"Where was the help for it?—unless we had stopped when the run began?"

"It would have been the more equitable way, if you were to stop at all," remarked Mr. Hastings.

"But we did not know we should stop. How was it possible to foresee that this panic was about to arise? Sir, all I can say is, I hope that Monday morning will see you and every other creditor paid in full."

Mr. Hastings was pushed away from the counter. Panic-stricken creditors were crowding there, clamoring to be paid. Mr. Hastings elbowed his way clear of the throng, and stood back,—stood in the deepest perplexity and care. What, if that orphan-money entrusted to his hands should be gone? His brow grew hot at the thought.

Not so hot as other brows there,—brows of men gifted with less equable temperament than that owned by the rector of All Souls'. One gentleman came in, and worked his way to the

front, the perspiration pouring off him as from one in his sharp agony.

"I want my money!" he cried. "I shall be a bankrupt next week if I can't get my money."

"I want my money!" cried a quieter voice at his elbow; and Mr. Hastings recognized the speaker as Barnaby, the corn-dealer.

They received the same answer,—the answer which was being reiterated in so many parts of the large room, in return to the same demand. The bank had been compelled to suspend its payments for the moment. But remittances were sent for, and would be down, if not that day, by Monday morning.

"When I paid in my two thousand pounds a few days ago, I asked whether it was all safe, before I'd leave it," said Mr. Barnaby, his tone one of wailing distress, though quiet still. But, quiet as it was, it was heard distinctly, for the people hushed their murmurs to listen to it. The prevalent feeling, for the most part, was exasperation; and any downright good cause of complaint against the bank and its management would have been half as welcome to the unfortunate malcontents as their money. Mr. Barnaby continued:

"I had heard a rumor that the bank wasn't right. I heard it at Rutt's. And I came down here with the two thousand pounds in my hand, and I saw Mr. George Godolphin in his private room. He told me it was right; that there was nothing the matter with it,—and I left the money. I am not given to use hard words; but, if I don't get it paid back to me, I shall say I have been swindled out of it."

"Mr. George couldn't have told that there'd be this run upon the bank, sir," replied a clerk, making the best answer that he could, the most plausible excuse,—as all the clerks had to exert their wits to do, that day. "The bank was all right then."

"If it was all right then, why isn't it all right now?" roared a chorus of

angry voices. "Banks don't get wrong in a day."

"Why did Mr. George Godolphin pass his word to me that it was safe?" repeated Mr. Barnaby, as though he had not heard the arguments of refute. "I should not have left my money here but for that."

The rector of All Souls' stood his ground behind, and listened. But that George Godolphin was his daughter's husband, he would have echoed the complaint: that, but for his positive assertion of the bank's solvency, he should not have left *his* money there,—the trust-money of the little Chisholms.

When the bank had virtually closed, the order gone forth to put up the shutters, Mr. Godolphin had retired to an inner room. These clamorous people had pushed in since, in defiance of the assurance that business for the day was over. Some of them demanded to see Mr. Godolphin. Mr. Hurde declined to introduce them to him. In doing so, he was acting on his own responsibility,—perhaps to save that gentleman vexation, perhaps out of consideration for his state of health. He knew that his master, perplexed and astounded with the state of affairs, could only answer them as he did,—that, on Monday morning, all being well, the bank would be open for business again. Did any undercurrent of doubt, that this would be the case, run in Mr. Hurde's own heart? If it did, he kept it down, refusing to admit it even to himself. One thing is certain,—until that unpleasant episode of the previous day, when the rough, unknown man had applied so loudly and inopportunistly for money, Mr. Hurde would have been ready to answer with his own life for the solvency of the house of Godolphin. He had believed, not only in the ability of the house to meet its demands and liabilities, but to meet them, if needful, twice over. That man's words, reflecting upon Mr. George Godolphin, grated on Mr. Hurde's ears at the time, and they had grated on his memory since. But, so

far as he could, he had beaten them down.

The crowd were got rid of. They became at length aware that stopping there would not answer their purpose in any way, would not do them good. They were fain to content themselves with that uncertain assurance, touching Monday morning, and went out, the door being immediately barred upon them. If the catastrophe of the day was unpleasant for the principals, it was not much less unpleasant for the clerks; and they lost no time in closing the entrance when the opportunity came. The only one who had remained was the rector of All Souls'.

"I must see Mr. Godolphin," said he.

"You can see him, sir, of course," was Mr. Hurde's answer. Mr. Hastings was different from the mob just got rid of. He had, so to say, a right of admittance to the presence of the principals in a threefold sense,—as a creditor, as their spiritual pastor, and as a near connection, a right which Mr. Hurde would not presume to dispute.

"Mr. Godolphin will see you, I am sure, sir," he continued, leading the way from the room towards Thomas Godolphin's. "He would have seen every soul that asked for him, of those now gone out. I knew that, and that's why I wouldn't let their messages be taken to him. Where would have been the use, to-day?"

Thomas Godolphin was sitting alone, very busily occupied, as it appeared, with books. Mr. Hastings cast a rapid glance round the room, but George was not in it.

It was not two minutes previously that George had left it, and Mr. Hastings only escaped seeing him by those two minutes. George had stood there, condoling with Thomas upon the untoward event of the day, apparently as perplexed as Thomas was, to account for its cause; and apparently as hopeful, nay, as positive, that ample funds would be down ere the day

should close, to apply their healing remedy.

"Mr. Godolphin, I have been asking Hurde for my money," were the first words uttered by the rector. "Will you not give it me?"

Thomas Godolphin turned his earnest dark eyes, terribly sad then, on Mr. Hastings, a strangely yearning look in their light. "I wish I could," he answered. "But even were it a thing possible for us to do, to give you a preference over others, it is not in our power. All the funds in hand are paid out."

The rector did not go over the old ground of argument, as he had to Mr. Hurde,—that it was unfair to give the earlier comers preference. It would answer no end now; and he was, besides, aware that he might have been among those earlier applicants, but for some cross-grained fate, which had taken him out of the way to the Pollard cottages, and restrained him from speaking to Isaac, when he saw him fly past. Whether Mr. Hastings would have got his nine thousand pounds is another matter. More especially if—as had been asserted by Mr. Hurde—the fact of the payment did not appear in the books.

"Where is George?" asked Mr. Hastings.

"He has gone to the telegraph office," replied Thomas Godolphin. "There has been more than time for answers to arrive—to be brought here—since our telegrams went up. George grew impatient, and is gone to the station."

"I wish to ask him how he could so have deceived me," resumed the rector. "He assured me but yesterday, as it were, that the bank was perfectly safe."

"As he no doubt thought. Nothing would have been the matter, but for this run. There's quite a panic in Prior's Ash, I am told; but what can have caused it, I know not. A deed of value belonging to Lord Averil has been lost or mislaid, and the report of that may have got about; but why it should have caused this fear is

to me utterly incomprehensible. I would have assured you myself yesterday, had you asked me, that we were perfectly safe and solvent. That we are so still will be proved on Monday morning."

The Reverend Mr. Hastings bent forward his head. "It would be worse than ruin to me, Mr. Godolphin. I should be held responsible for the Chisholm's money,—should be called upon to refund it: and I have no means of doing so. I dare not contemplate the position."

"What are you talking of?" asked Thomas Godolphin. "I do not understand. We hold no money belonging to the Chisholms."

"Indeed you do," was the reply. "You had it all. I paid in the proceeds of the sale, nine thousand and forty-five pounds."

Mr. Godolphin paused at the assertion, looking at the rector, somewhat in the manner that his head-clerk had done. "When did you pay it in?" he inquired.

"A few days ago. I brought it in the evening, after banking-hours. Brierly came over from Binham and paid it to me, and I brought it here at once. It was a large sum to keep in the house. As things have turned out, I wish I had kept it," concluded the rector, speaking plainly.

"Paid it to George?"

"Yes. Maria was present. I have his receipt for it, Mr. Godolphin," added the rector. "You almost appear to doubt the fact,—as Hurde did, when I spoke to him just now. He said it did not appear in the books."

"Neither does it," replied Thomas Godolphin. "But I do not doubt you, now you tell me of the transaction. George must have omitted to enter it."

That "omission" began to work in the minds of both, more than either cared to tell. Thomas Godolphin was marvelling at his brother's reprehensible carelessness: the rector of All Souls' was beginning to wonder whether "carelessness" was the deepest sin about to be laid open in the

conduct of George Godolphin. Very unpleasant doubts, he could scarcely tell why, were rising up within him. His keen eye searched the countenance of Thomas Godolphin; but he read nothing there to confirm his doubts. On the contrary, that countenance, save for the great sorrow and vexation upon it, was, as it ever was, clear and open as the day. Not yet, not quite yet, had the honest faith of years, reposed by Thomas Godolphin in his brother, been shaken. Very, very soon was it to come: not the faith to be simply shaken, but rudely destroyed,—blasted forever, like a tree torn up by the lightning.

It was of no use for Mr. Hastings to remain. All the satisfaction to be obtained was—the confidently expressed hope that Monday would set things straight. “It would be utter ruin to me, you know,” he said, as he rose.

“It would be ruin to numbers,” replied Thomas Godolphin. “I pray you, do not glance at any thing so terrible. There is no cause for it; there is not indeed: our resources are ample. I can only say that I should wish I had died long ago, rather than have lived to witness such ruin brought upon others through us.”

Lord Averil was asking to see Thomas Godolphin, and entered his presence as Mr. Hastings left it. He came in, all impulse. It appeared that he had gone for a ride that morning after breakfast, and knew nothing of the tragedy then being enacted in the town. Do you think the word too strong a one—tragedy? Wait and see its effects. In passing the bank on his return, Lord Averil saw the shutters up. In the moment’s shock, his fears flew to Thomas Godolphin. He forgot that the death, even of the principal, would not cause the closing of a bank for business. Lord Averil, a peer, having nothing to do with business and its ways, may have been excused the mistake.

He pulled short up, and sat staring at the bank, his heart beating, his face growing hot. But the previous day

he had seen Thomas Godolphin in health (comparatively speaking) and life; and now—could he be dead? Casting his eyes on the stragglers gathered on the pavement before the banking-doors,—an unusual number of stragglers, though Lord Averil was too much occupied with other thoughts to take note of the fact,—he leaned down and addressed one of them. It happened to be Rutt, the lawyer, who in passing had stopped to talk with the groups gathered there. Why *did* groups gather there? The bank was hermetically sealed for the rest of the day, nothing to be obtained from its aspect but blank solid walls and a blank solid door. What good did it do people to halt there and stare at it? What good does it do them to halt before a house where murder has been committed, and stare at that?

The Viscount Averil bent from his horse to Rutt the lawyer. “What has happened? Is Mr. Godolphin dead?”

“It is not that, my lord. The bank has stopped.”

“The—bank—has——stopped?” repeated Lord Averil, making a pause before each word, in his astonishment, and a greater pause before the last.

“Half an hour ago, my lord. There has been a run upon it this morning; and, now that they have paid out all their funds, they are obliged to stop.”

Lord Averil could not recover his consternation. “What occasioned the run?” he asked.

“Well—your lordship must understand that rumors got abroad. I heard them, days ago. Some say, now, that they had no foundation, and that the bank will resume business on Monday as usual, when remittances arrive. The telegraph has been at work pretty well for the house the last hour, or so,” concluded Mr. Rutt.

Lord Averil leaped from his horse, gave it to a lad to hold, and went round to the private door. Thence he was admitted, as you have seen, to the presence of Thomas Godolphin.

Not of his own loss had he gone to speak—the sixteen thousand pounds involved in the disappearance of the deeds, and which, if the bank ceased its payments, might never be refunded to him. No. Although he saw the premises closed, and heard that the bank had stopped, not a doubt crossed Lord Averil of its real stability. That the run upon it had caused its temporary suspension, and that all would be made right on the Monday, as Mr. Rutt had suggested, he fully believed.

"I never heard of it, until this moment," he impulsively cried, clasping the hand of Thomas Godolphin. "In returning now from a ride, I saw the shutters closed, and learned what had happened. There has been a run upon the bank, I understand."

"Yes," replied Thomas, in a subdued tone, that told of mental pain. "It is a very untoward thing."

"But what induced it?"

"I cannot imagine. Unless it was the rumor, which no doubt got spread, of the loss of your deed. I suppose it was that: magnified in the telling, possibly, into the loss of half the coffers of the bank. Panics have arisen from much slighter causes; as those versed in the money market could tell you."

"But how foolish people must be!"

"When a panic arises, people are not themselves," remarked Thomas Godolphin. "One catches up the fear from another, like they catch an epidemic. I wish our friends and customers had had more confidence in us. But I cannot blame them."

"They are saying, outside, that business will be resumed."

"Yes. As soon as we can get remittances down. Sunday intervenes, and of course nothing can be done until Monday."

"Well now, my friend, can I help you?" rejoined Lord Averil. "I am a richer man than the world gives me credit for; owing to the inexpensive life I have led, since that one false step of mine, when barely out of my teens. I will give you my signature

to any amount. If you can contrive to let it be known, it may bring the people to their senses."

Thomas Godolphin's generous spirit opened to the proof of confidence: it shone forth from his quiet dark eyes as he gazed at Lord Averil.

"Thank you sincerely for the kindness. I shall gratefully remember it to the last day of my life. An hour or two ago, I do not know but I might have availed myself of it; as it is, it is too late. The bank is closed for the day, and nothing more, good or bad, can be done until Monday morning. Long before that, I expect assistance will have arrived."

"Very well. But if you want further assistance, you know where to come for it," concluded Lord Averil. "I shall be in Prior's Ash. Do you know," he continued, in a musing sort of tone, "since I renounced that proposed sea expedition, I have begun to feel more like a homeless man than I ever yet did. If there were a desirable place for sale in this neighborhood, I am not sure but I should purchase it, and settle down."

Thomas Godolphin gave but a slight answer. His own business was enough for him to think of for one day. Lord Averil suddenly remembered this, and said something to the effect, but he did not yet rise to go. Surely he could not at that moment be contemplating the speaking to Mr. Godolphin about Cecil! Another minute and Mr. Hurde had come into the room, bearing a telegraphic dispatch in his hand.

"Has Mr. George brought this?" Thomas inquired, as he took it.

"No, sir. It came by the regular messenger."

"George must have missed him, then," was Thomas Godolphin's mental comment.

He opened the paper. He cast his eyes over the contents. It was a short message; but a few words in it, simple and easy to comprehend; but Thomas Godolphin apparently could not comprehend it. Such at least was the impression conveyed to Lord Averil and Mr. Hurde. Both were

watching him, though without motive. The clerk waited for any orders there might be: Lord Averil sat on, as he had been sitting. Thomas Godolphin read it three times, and then glanced up at Mr. Hurde.

"This cannot be for us," he remarked. "Some mistake must have been made. Some confusion, possibly, in the telegraph office in town; and the message, intended for us, has gone elsewhere."

"That could hardly be, sir," was Mr. Hurde's reply.

In good truth, Thomas Godolphin himself thought it could hardly be. But—if the message had come right—what did it mean? Mr. Hurde, racking his brains to conjecture the nature of the message that was so evidently disturbing his master, contrived to catch sight of two or three words at the tail: and they seemed to convey some ominous notion that there were no funds to be forthcoming.

Thomas Godolphin was disturbed; and in no measured degree. His hands grew cold and his brow moist, as he gazed at the dispatch in its every corner. "According to its address, it was meant for their house, and in answer to one of the dispatches he had sent up that morning. But—its contents! Surely they could not be addressed to the good old house of Godolphin, Crosse, and Godolphin!

A moment or two of wavering hesitation and then he drew to him a sheet of paper, wrote a few words, and folded it. "Take this yourself with all speed to the telegraph station," he said to Mr. Hurde. "Send the message up at once, and wait there for the answer. It will not be long in coming. And if you meet Mr. George, tell him I wish to see him."

"And now I dare say you will be glad to get rid of me," remarked Lord Averil, as Mr. Hurde hastened out. "This is not a day to intrude upon you for long: and I dare say the fellow to whom I entrusted my horse is thinking something of the same."

He shook hands cordially, and went away, leaving Thomas Godolphin to battle with his care alone. Ah me! no human aid, henceforth, could help him, by so much as a passing word, with the terrible battle already set in. God alone, who had been with Thomas Godolphin through life, could whisper to him a word of comfort, or shed down a few drops of sustaining balm, so that he might battle through, and bear. That God had been with him, in the midst of the deep sorrows He had seen fit to cast upon him, Thomas knew: he knew that He would be with him always, even unto the end.

"You had better accept my offer of assistance," Lord Averil turned back to say.

"No," broke from Thomas Godolphin in a sharp tone of pain, very different from the calm, if grateful, answer he had previously given to the same proposition. "What sort of justice would it be if I robbed you to pay the claims of others?"

"You can refund to me when the panic's over," returned the viscount, somewhat surprised at the nature of the reply.

"Yes. But—but—it might be a risk," was the rejoinder, given with unwonted hesitation. "In a crisis, such as this, it is, I believe, impossible to foresee what the end may be. Thank you greatly, Averil, all the same."

Mr. Hurde was not very long before he returned, bringing with him an answer to the last message. Moistened and moister became Thomas Godolphin's brow as he read it: colder and colder grew his hand. It appeared to be but a confirmation of the one received before.

"I cannot understand this," he murmured.

Mr. Hurde stood by. That some ominous fear had arisen, he saw. He was an old and faithful servant of the house, entirely devoted to its interests. His master said a few words of explanation to him.

They aroused Mr. Hurde's fears. Had some deep-laid treachery been at work?—some comprehensive scheme

of duplicity been enacting for some time past, making a bankrupt house appear to be still a flourishing one? If so, it could only have been done by falsifying the books: and that could only have been done by George Godolphin.

Mr. Hurde did not dare to give vent to his thoughts. Indeed, he did not seriously contemplate that they could be types of the reality. But, in the uncertainty created, he deemed himself perfectly justified in mentioning to Mr. Godolphin the untoward occurrence of the previous day; the demand of the rude man for money, and the unpleasant expressions he had used of the state of affairs of Mr. George Godolphin. He was clearing his throat to begin in his usual slow fashion, when Mr. Godolphin spoke.

"I shall go to town by the first train, Hurde,—the express. It will be through in half an hour."

Then Mr. Hurde told his tale. It did not tend to reassure Thomas Godolphin.

He rang the bell. He caused George to be inquired for. But George was not in the house. He had not been back since that errand of his, ostensibly to the telegraph-office.

Thomas could not wait. He wrote a note to George, and sealed it. He then charged a servant with a message for Miss Godolphin at Ashlydyat, gave a few directions to Mr. Hurde, proceeded on foot to the station without further preparations, and started on his journey.

Started on his journey. Strange doubts and fears making a havoc of his beating heart.

CHAPTER XLIV.

BOBBING JOAN.

MARIA GODOLPHIN was in her own pretty sitting-room up-stairs. Fine ladies would have called it their "boudoir." Maria did not: she was

not given to be fine. She had been sitting there ever since breakfast; had not yet stirred out of it, though noon had passed, for she was very busy. Not fond of sewing in a general way, she was plying her needle quickly now: some fine intricate work of braiding, to be converted into a frock for Miss Meta. Maria worked as if her heart were in it: it was for her child.

The door was closed, the window was open to the summer air. The scent of the flowers ascended from the garden below, the gentle hum of the insects was heard as they sported in the sun, the scene altogether was one of entire tranquillity. There was an air of repose about the room, about Maria in her cool, muslin dress, about the scene altogether. Who, looking at it, would have suspected the turmoil that was being enacted—or that had been enacted so recently—in another part of the house?

It is a positive fact that Maria knew nothing yet of the grievous calamity which had fallen,—the stoppage of the bank. The servants knew it, fast enough; were more correctly acquainted with its details (to hear them speak) than the bank itself. They stood about in groups and talked in whispers, letting the work go. But not one of them had presumed to acquaint their unconscious mistress. They knew how entirely ignorant of it all she was; they felt certain that not a suspicion of any thing going wrong had ever crossed her. In point of fact, it had not crossed their own inquisitive selves, and the fact had burst upon them that morning like a thunder-clap.

Like a thunder-clap it was soon to burst upon Maria. A few minutes' respite yet, ere it should come. She certainly had heard the hall-bell, the visitors'-bell, ring three or four times, which was somewhat unusual, considering that no message for her had followed upon it. The ringing of that bell in the daytime generally heralded guests for herself. Once, when Pierce came in, bringing a small par-

cel for her from the bookseller's, Maria had inquired who it was that had just rung at the hall-door. Pierce answered that it was Lord Averil; that his lordship had asked to see Mr. Godolphin. Maria could not remember afterwards, when looking back on the circumstances of the day, whether or not it had occurred to her to wonder why Lord Averil should come to the private door, when his visit was to the bank and Thomas Godolphin. Pierce ventured not another word. He never said, "Ma'am, there's something the matter, I'm afraid; there's a run upon the bank." He just put the parcel down and sidled off, very much after the manner of one who is afraid of being asked questions.

And yet the man in his sober judgment believed that there was little danger of any inconvenient questions being put by his mistress. There was none. Of all people living, none were so completely unconscious that any thing wrong was looming, as Mrs. George Godolphin. If there was one house in the kingdom more safe, more staid, more solid than other houses, she believed it to be theirs. Yes, it was a notable fact, that Maria, sitting there so serenely tranquil, knew nothing of what was stirring Prior's Ash, from one end of it to the other, to the highest pitch of excitement. Perhaps it would not be too much to say that she was the last person in it whom the news reached.

The work—her work, that she held in her hand—was approaching completion, and she looked at it with fond eyes. She had been two or three weeks over it, sitting steadily to it several of the days. It was very pretty, certainly,—a new sort of work just come up, done with a new sort of braid; and would, beyond question, look charming on Miss Meta when distended out as a balloon, like it was the fashion of that young lady's short petticoats to be distended. Now and then Maria would be visited with doubtful visions as to whether the thing

would "wash." That is, to wash and look as well afterwards as it did now. She could only hope for the best, and that Miss Meta would be upon her good behaviour when wearing it, and not blacken it beyond redemption the first time it was on.

"I hope I shall have enough braid," deliberated Maria, comparing the small piece yet remaining to do with the braid in hand. "I wish I had told Margery to bring me in another piece! she will be passing the shop. I must send, if I find it running short. If I have no hindrances to-day, I shall finish it."

One hindrance occurred almost as Maria was speaking,—the entrance of her husband. With him in the room she was continually looking off to talk, if she did not entirely lay it down; altogether she did not get on so fast as when alone. He had just come in from that excursion to the telegraph-office. *Had* he been there? Or had his proclaimed visit been but a plea ostensibly set forth, an excuse to get out of his brother's presence, away from that troubled scene, the bank?

There was no knowing. George never said, then or afterwards. He never said whether his return now was the result of his having accidentally seen his brother at a distance, walking along at a quick pace. He came in by the hall-door (there was no other way open, to-day), letting himself in with his latch-key. Mr. Hurde was there yet, posting, or doing something or other to a pile of books.

"Is Mr. Godolphin gone for the day?" asked George.

"Mr. Godolphin's gone to London, sir."

"To London!" echoed George, in his surprise. "What is taking him there?"

"Some queer messages have come down by telegraph," returned Mr. Hurde, pushing his spectacles up, and looking George full in the face. "Mr. Godolphin could not understand them, and he is gone to town."

George did not make any observation for a minute. Was he afraid to make further inquiries? "What were the messages?" he presently asked.

"Mr. Godolphin did not show them to me, sir," was the answer, spoken, or George fancied it, in a curt tone. "He said enough to tell me that there appeared to be some great cause for disquiet,—and he has gone to see about it. He left a note in the parlor, sir, for you.

Mr. Hurde buried his face over his books again,—a genteel hint, perhaps, that he wished the colloquy to end,—if his master would be pleased to take it. George entered the parlor and caught up the note.

"Be at home to callers; answer all inquiries," repeated he, reciting the last words of the note. "I wish Thomas may get it! Now that the explosion has come, Prior's Ash is no place for me."

Many and many a day had there intruded into George Godolphin's mind a vision of this very time, when the "explosion" should have "come." He had never dwelt upon it. He had driven it away from him to the utmost of his power. Perhaps it is not in the nature of those, whose course of conduct is such as to bring down these explosions as a natural sequence, to anticipate with uncomfortable minuteness the period of their arrival, or their particular manner of meeting it. Certainly George Godolphin had not: but there had been ever an under-current of conviction lying dormant in his heart, that he should not face it in person. When the brunt of the scandal was over, then he might return to home and Prior's Ash: but he would not wait there to be present at its fall.

He crushed Thomas Godolphin's note into his pocket, and stood upright on the hearth-rug to *think*. He knew that, if treated according to his deserts, that would be the last friendly note written him by his brother for many a day to come. Thomas was then being whirled on his way to the full knowledge of his, George's, delin-

quency: or, if not to the full knowledge, which perhaps could only be unfolded by degrees, like we turn the pages of a book, to quite enough of it. It was time for him to be off now. If inquisitive callers must be seen, Hurde could see them.

Conscience makes cowards of us all,—a saying, not more trite than true. Very absurd cowards it makes of us now and then. As George Godolphin stood there, revolving the *pros* and *cons* of his getting away, the ways and means of his departure, a thought flashed into his mind of whether he should be allowed to depart if an inkling of his exodus got wind. It actually did,—unfounded as was any cause for it. The fear came from his lively conscience; but from nothing else. He might be seen at the railway station, and stopped: he might,—"Tush!" interrupted George, angrily, coming out of the foolish fear and returning into his sober senses. "People here know nothing yet beyond the bare fact that the bank has suspended payment. They can't stop a man for that."

But, how about ways and means? Ay, that was more necessary to be considered. The money in George's pockets amounted—I am telling you truth—to three-and-sixpence, and twopence in halfpence. With all his faults he was open-hearted, open-handed. He had been weak, imprudent, extravagant; he had been enacting a course of deceit to his brother and to the world, forced to it (he would have told you) by his great need and his great dread; he had made use of other men's property; he had, in short, entirely violated those good rules that public lamentation is made for every Sunday,—he had left undone those things that he ought to have done, and he had done those things that he ought not to have done: but it was not for himself (in one sense) that he had done this. It was not for himself, selfishly. He had not made a private purse for the evil day, or put by money to serve his wants when other moneys should fail. As long as

he had the money he had spent it,—whether in paying claims, or in making charming presents to friends, as to Charlotte Pain, for instance,—elegant little trifles that of course cost nothing, or next to it; or in new dolls for Meta; or in giving a sovereign to some poor, broken-down tradesman, who wanted to get upon his legs again. In one way or other the money had been spent; not a single shilling had George hoarded up; so, in that sense, he had been neither selfish nor dishonest.

And, now that the crash had come, he was without means. He had not so much as the fare in his pocket that would suffice to convey him away out of the scene of turmoil that the next week would inevitably bring forth. The bank-funds were likewise exhausted; so that he had not them to turn to. But, get away he must: and, it seemed to him, the sooner the better.

He came forth through the separating-door between the bank and the dwelling, and entered the dining-room. The tray was laid for luncheon, and for Meta's dinner: but nobody was in the room. He went up-stairs to Maria's sitting-room. She was there, quietly at work: and she looked up at him with a glad smile of welcome. Her attitude of repose, her employment, the expression of calm happiness pervading her countenance, told George that she was as yet in ignorance.

"What money have you in your purse, Maria?" asked he, speaking carelessly.

Maria laughed. "Why none," she answered, quite in a merry accent,— "or, as good as none. I have been telling you ever so long, George, that I must have some money; and I must. A good deal I mean,—to pay my housekeeping bills."

"Just see what you have got," returned George. "I want to borrow it."

Maria put her hand in her pocket, and then found that her purse was

in her desk. She gave the keys to George, and asked him to unlock it.

The purse was in a small compartment, lying on a ten-pound note. In the purse there proved to be a sovereign and seven shillings. George put the money and the purse back again, and took up the note.

"You sly girl?" cried he, in a mock-serious tone. "To tell me you had no money! What special *cadeaux* is this put by for? A golden chain for Meta?"

"That is not mine, George. It is old Dame Bond's. I told you about it, if you remember."

"I'll take this," said George, transferring the note to his pocket.

"Oh, no, George, don't take that!" exclaimed Maria. "She may be coming for it any hour. I promised to return it to her whenever she asked for it."

"My dear, you shall have it back again. She won't come to-day."

"Why can you not get a note from the bank, instead of taking that?"

George made no answer. He turned into his bedroom. Maria thought nothing of the omission: she supposed his mind to be preoccupied. In point of fact, she thought little of his taking the note. With coffers full (as she supposed) to turn to, the borrowing of a ten-pound note seemed an affair of no moment.

She sat on about ten minutes, hard at work. George remained in his bedroom, occupied (as it appeared to Maria) in opening and shutting various drawers. Somewhat curious as to what he could be doing, she at length rose from her seat and looked in. He was packing a portmanteau.

"Are you going out, George?" she exclaimed, in surprise.

"For a few days. Business is calling me to town. Look here, Maria. I shall take nothing with me beyond my small black-leather hand-case; but you send this by one of the men to the station to-night. It must come after me."

"What a very sudden determina-

tion, George!" she cried. "You did not say any thing this morning."

"I did not know then that I should have to go. Don't look sad, child. I shan't be long away."

"It seems to me that you are always going away now, George," she observed, her tone as sad as her looks.

"Business must be attended to," responded George, shaking out a coat that he was about to fold. "I don't in the least covet going, I assure you, Maria."

What more she would have said was interrupted by a noise. Somebody had entered the sitting-room with much commotion. Maria returned to it, and saw Meta and Margery.

Meta had been the whole morning long in the hay-field. Not the particular hay-field mentioned previously; that one was clear of hay now; but to some other hay-field, whose cocks were in full bloom,—if such an expression may be used with regard to hay. There were few things Miss Meta liked so much as a roll in the hay,—and, so long as cocks were to be found in the neighborhood, Margery would be coaxed over to take her to them. Margery did not particularly dislike it herself. Margery's rolling-days were over; but, seated at the foot of one of the cocks, her knitting in her hand, and the child in view, Margery found the time pass agreeably enough. As she had, on this day: and the best proof of it was, that she had stayed beyond her time. Miss Meta's dinner was waiting.

Miss Meta was probably aware of the fact by sundry inward warnings. She had gone flying into her mamma's sitting-room, tugging at the strings of her hat, which had got into a knot. Margery had flown in, nearly as fast; certainly in greater excitement.

"Is it true, ma'am?" she gasped out, the moment she saw Maria.

"Is what true?" inquired Maria.

"That the bank has broke. When I saw the shutters up, and the door barred, for all the world as if everybody in the house was dead, you might

have knocked me down with a feather. There's quite a crowd round; and one of 'em told me the bank had broke."

George came out of his bedroom. "Take this child to the nursery, and get her ready for her dinner," said he, in the quick, decisive, haughty manner that he now and then used, though rarely to Margery.

Margery withdrew with the child, and George looked at his wife. She was standing in perplexity; half aghast, half in disbelief; and she turned her questioning eyes on George.

But for those words of Margery's, whose sound had penetrated to his bedroom, would he have said any thing to Maria before his departure? It must remain a question. Now he had no other resource.

"The fact is, Maria, we have had a run upon the bank this morning,—have been compelled to suspend payment. For the present," added George, vouchsafing to Maria the hopeful view of the case which his brother, in his ignorance, took.

She did not answer. She felt too much dismayed. Perhaps, in her mind's astonished confusion, she could not yet distinctly comprehend. George placed her in a chair.

"How scared you look, child! There's no cause for that. Such things happen every day."

"George—George!" she reiterated, struggling as it were for utterance, "do you mean that the bank has failed? I don't think I understand."

"For the present. Some cause or other, that we can none of us get to the bottom of, induced a run upon us to-day."

"A run? You mean that people all came together, wanting to withdraw their money?"

"Yes. We paid as long as our funds held out. And then we closed."

She burst into a most distressing flood of tears. The shock, from unclouded prosperity—she had not known that that prosperity was hollow—to ruin, to disgrace, was more than she could bear calmly. George

felt vexed. It seemed as if the tears reproached him.

"For goodness' sake, Maria, don't take on like that!" he testily cried. "It will blow over; it will be all right?"

But he put his arm round her, in spite of his testy words. Maria leaned her face upon his bosom, and sobbed out her tears upon it. He did not like the tears at all; he spoke quite crossly; and Maria did her best to hush them.

"What will be done?" she asked, choking down some rebellious sobs, that were for rising in spite of her.

"Don't trouble yourself about that. I have been obliged to tell you, because it is a thing that cannot be concealed; but it will not affect your peace and comfort, I hope. There's no cause for tears."

"Will the bank go on again?"

"Thomas is gone up to London, expecting to bring funds down. In that case, it will open on Monday morning."

How could he tell it her? Knowing as he did know, and he alone, that through his deep-laid machinations there were no longer funds available for the bank or for Thomas Godolphin.

"Need you go to London," she asked, in a wailing tone, "if Thomas is gone? I shall be left all alone."

"I must go. There's no help for it."

"And which day shall you be back? By Monday?"

"Not perhaps by Monday. Keep up your spirits, Maria. It will be all right."

Meta came bursting in. She was going down to dinner. Was mamma coming to her lunch?

No, mamma did not want any. Margery would attend to her. George picked up the child and carried her into his room. In his drawers he had found some trifling toy, brought home for Meta weeks ago, and forgotten to be given to her. It had lain there since. It was one of those renowned articles, rarer now than they had used to be, called Bobbing Joan. George had given sixpence for it,—a lady, with a black head and neck and no

visible legs. He put it on the top of the drawers, touched it and set it bobbing at Meta.

She was all delight; she stretched out her hands for it eagerly. But George, neglecting the toy, sat down on a chair, and clasped the child in his arms, and showered upon her more passionately heartfelt embraces than perhaps he had ever given to living mortal, child or woman. He did not keep her: the last long lingering kiss was pressed upon her rosy lips, and he put her down, handed her the toy, and bade her run and show it to mamma.

Away she went; to mamma first, and then off in search of Margery. Maria went into the bedroom to her husband. He was locking the port-manteau.

"That is all, I believe," he said, transferring the keys to his pocket, and taking up the small hand-case. "Remember that it is sent off by to-night's train, Maria. I have addressed it."

"You are not going now, George?" she said, her heart seeming to fail her strangely.

"Yes I am."

"But—there is no train yet a while. The express must have passed this half-hour."

"I shall ride over to Crancomb and take the train there," he answered. "I have some business in the place," added he, by way of stopping any questions as to the why and wherefore. "Listen, Maria. You need not mention that I have gone, until you see Thomas on Monday morning. Tell him."

"Shall you not see him yourself in London?" she returned. "Are you not going to meet him?"

"I may miss him: it is just possible," was the reply of George, spoken with all the candor in life, just as though his mission to London was the express one of meeting his brother. "If Thomas should return home without having seen me, I mean."

"What am I to tell him?" she asked.

"Only that I am gone. There's no necessity to say any thing else. I shall—if I miss seeing him in town—I shall write to him here."

"And when shall you be back?"

"Soon. Good-by, my darling."

He held his wife folded in his arms, like he had recently held Meta. The tears were raining down her cheeks.

"Don't grieve, Maria. It will blow over, I say. God bless you. Take care of Meta."

Maria's heart felt as if it were breaking. But in the midst of her own distress, she remembered the claims of others. "That ten-pound note, George? If you are not back in a day or two, how shall I have it? The woman may be coming for it."

"Oh, I shall be back. Or you can ask Thomas."

In his careless indifference he thought he should be back. He was not going to *run away*: only to absent himself from the brunt of the explosion. That his delinquencies would be patent to Thomas and to others by Monday morning, he knew: it would be just as well to let some of their astonishment and anger have vent and evaporate without his presence,—be far more agreeable to himself, personally. In his careless indifference, too, he had spoken the words, "You can ask Thomas." A moment's consideration would have told him that Thomas would have no ten-pound notes to give to Maria. George Godolphin was one who never lost heart. He was indulging, now, the most extravagantly sanguine hopes of raising money in London, by some means or other. Perhaps Verrall could help him?

He strained his wife to his heart, kissed her again, and was gone. Maria sat down in the midst of her blinding tears.

Walking round to the stables, he waited there while his horse was got ready, mounted him, the small black case in front, and rode away alone. The groom thought his master was but going out for a ride, like he did

on other days: but the man did wonder that Mr. George should go *that* day. Crancomb was a small place about five miles off: it had a railway station, and the ordinary trains stopped there. What motive induced him to go there to take the train, he best knew. Probably, he did not care to excite the observation and comments which his going off from Prior's Ash on that day would be sure to excite. Seriously to fear being stopped, he did not.

He rode along at a leisurely pace, reaching Crancomb just before the up-train was expected. Evidently the day's great disaster had not yet traveled to Crancomb. George was received with all the tokens of respect, ever accorded to the Godolphins. He charged the landlord of the inn to send his horse back to Prior's Ash on Monday morning, changed Mrs. Bond's ten-pound note, and chatted familiarly to the employés at the station after taking his ticket.

Up came the train. Two or three solitary passengers, bound for the place, descended, two or three mounted into it. The whistle sounded; the engine shrieked and puffed; and George Godolphin, nodding familiarly around with his gay smile, was carried onwards on his road to London.

Maria had sat on, her blinding tears raining down. What a change it was! What a contrast from the happiness of the morning! That a few minutes should have power to bring forth so awful a change! The work she had been so eager over before, lay on the table. Where had its enjoyment gone? She turned from it now with a feeling not far removed from sickness. Nothing could be thought of now but the great trouble which had fallen: there was no further satisfaction to be derived from outward things. The work lay there, untouched; destined, though she knew it not, never to have another stitch set in it by its mistress; and she sat on and on, her hands clasped inertly before her, her brain throbbing with its uncertainty and care.

CHAPTER XLV.

MRS. BOND'S VISIT.

IN the old study at All Souls' Rectory—if you have not forgotten that modest room—in the midst of nearly as much untidiness as used to characterize it when the little Hastingses were in their untidy ages, sat some of them in the summer's evening. Rose's drawings and fancy-work lay about; Mrs. Hastings's more substantial sewing lay about; and a good deal of litter besides, out of Reginald's pockets; not to speak of books belonging to the boys, fishing-tackle, and sundries.

Nothing was being touched, nothing used; it all lay neglected, like Maria Godolphin's work had done, earlier in the afternoon. Mrs. Hastings sat in a listless attitude, her elbow on the old cloth cover of the table, her face turned to her children. Rose sat at the window; Isaac and Reginald were standing by the mantelpiece; and Grace, her bonnet thrown off on the floor, her shawl unpinned and partially falling from her shoulders, half sat, half knelt at her mother's side, her face upturned to her, asking for particulars of the calamity. Grace had come running in but a few minutes ago, eager, anxious, and impulsive.

"Only think the state I have been in!" she cried. "But one servant in the house, and unable to leave baby to get down here! I——"

"What brings you with only one servant?" interrupted Rose.

"Because Ann's mother is ill, and I have let her go home until Monday morning. I wish you'd not put me out with frivolous questions, Rose!" added Grace, in her old, quick, sharp manner. "Any other day but Saturday, I'd have left baby to Martha, and she might have put her work off; but on Saturdays there's always so much to do. I had half a mind to come and bring the baby myself. What should I care, if Prior's Ash did see me carrying him? But, mamma, you don't tell me—how has this dreadful thing been brought on?"

"I tell you, Grace!" returned Mrs. Hastings. "I should be glad to know myself."

"There's a report going about—Tom picked it up somewhere and brought it home to me—that Mr. George Godolphin has been playing pranks with the bank's money," continued Grace.

"Grace, my dear, were I you, I would not repeat such a report," gravely observed Mrs. Hastings.

Grace shrugged her shoulders. George Godolphin had never been a favorite of hers, and never would be. "It may turn out to be true," said she.

"Then, my dear, it will be time enough for us to talk of it, when it does. You are fortunate, Grace: you had no money there."

"I'm sure we had," answered Grace, more bluntly than politely. "We had thirty pounds there. And thirty pounds would be as much of a loss to us as thirty hundred to some."

"Akeman must be getting on—to keep a banking account!" cried free Reginald.

Grace, for a wonder, did not detect the irony; though she knew that Reginald—like herself by George Godolphin—had never liked Mr. Akeman, and always told Grace she had lowered herself by marrying an architect of no standing.

"Seven hundred pounds were lodged in the bank, to his account, when that chapel-of-ease was begun," she said, in answer to Reginald's remark. "He has drawn it all out, for wages and such like, except thirty pounds. And of course that, if it is lost, will be our loss. Had the bank stood until next week, there would have been a further large sum paid in. Will it go on again, Isaac?"

"You may as well ask questions of a stranger, as ask them of me, Grace," was her brother Isaac's answer. "I cannot tell you any thing certain."

"You won't, you mean," retorted Grace. "I suppose you clerks may not tell tales out of school. What sum has the bank gone for, Isaac? That, surely, may be told."

"Not for any sum," was Isaac's answer. "The bank has not 'gone' yet, in that sense. There was a run upon the bank this morning, and the calls were so great that we had not enough money in the place to satisfy them, and were obliged to cease paying. It is said that the bank will be open again on Monday, when assistance shall have come; that business will be resumed, as usual. Mr. Godolphin himself said so; and he is not one to say a thing unless it has foundation. I know nothing more than that, Grace, whatever you may choose to infer."

"Do you mean to tell me that there are no suspicions in the bank that something, more than the public yet knows, is amiss with George Godolphin?" persisted Grace.

Isaac answered lightly and evasively. He was aware that such suspicions were afloat with the clerks. Led to chiefly by that application from the stranger, and his rude and significant charges, made so publicly. Isaac had not been present at that application: it was somewhat curious, perhaps—for there's a freemasonry runs amidst the clerks of an establishment, and they talk freely one with another—that he never heard of it until after the stoppage of the firm. If he had heard of it, he would certainly have told his father. But whatever private suspicions he and his fellow-clerks might be entertaining against George Godolphin, he was not going to speak of them to Grace Akeman.

Grace turned to her mother. "Papa has a thousand pounds or two there, has he not?"

"Ah, child! if that were but all!" returned Mrs. Hastings, with a groan.

"Why! What more has he there?" asked Grace, startled by the words and the tone. Rose, startled also, turned round to await the answer.

Mrs. Hastings seemed to hesitate. But only for a moment. "I do not know why I should not tell you," she said, looking at her daughters. "Isaac and Reginald both know it. He had just lodged there the trust-money be-

longing to the Chisholms: nine thousand and forty-five pounds."

A blank silence fell upon the room. Grace and her sister were too dismayed to speak immediately. Reginald, who had now seated himself astride on a chair, his face and arms hanging over the back of it, set up a soft, lugubrious whistle, the tune of some old sea-song,—feeling, possibly, the silence to be uncomfortable. To disclose a little secret, Mr. Reginald was not in the highest of spirits, having been subjected to some hard scolding that day on the part of his father and some tears on the part of his mother, touching the non-existence of any personal baggage. He had arrived at home for the fourth time since his first departure for sea, his luggage consisting exclusively of a shirt and a half. Of every thing else belonging to him, which he had taken out, he was able to give no account whatever. It is rather a common complaint amongst young sailors.

"Is papa responsible for it?" The half-frightened question came from Rose.

"Certainly he is," replied Mrs. Hastings. "If the bank should not go on, why—we are ruined. As well as those poor children, the Chisholms."

"Oh, mamma! why did he not draw it out this morning?" cried Grace, in a tone of pain. "Tom told me that many people had got paid in full."

"Had he known the state the bank was in, that there was any thing the matter with it, no doubt he would have drawn it out," returned Mrs. Hastings.

"Did Maria know it was paid in?"

"Yes."

Grace's eyes flashed fire. Somehow, she was never inclined to be too considerate to Maria. She never had been, from a child. "A dutiful daughter! Not to give her father warning!"

"Maria may not have been able to do it," observed Mrs. Hastings. "Per-

haps she did not know that any thing was wrong."

"Nonsense, mamma!" was Grace's answer. "We have heard—when a thing like this happens, you know people begin to talk freely, to compare notes, as it were—and we have heard that George Godolphin and Maria are owing money all over the town. Maria has not paid her housekeeping bills for ever so long. *Of course* she must have known what was coming!"

Mrs. Hastings did not dispute the point with Grace. The main fact troubled her too greatly for minor considerations to be very prominent yet. She had never found Maria other than a considerate and dutiful daughter: and she must be convinced that she had not been so in this instance, before she could believe it.

"She was afraid of compromising George Godolphin," cried Grace, in a bitter tone. "He has ever been first and foremost with her."

"She might have given the warning without compromising him," returned Mrs. Hastings; but, in making the remark, she did not intend to cast any reflection on Maria. "When your papa went to pay the money in, it was after banking-hours. Maria was alone, and he told her what he had brought. Had she been aware of any thing wrong, she might have given a hint to him, there and then. It need never have been known to George Godolphin—even that your papa had any intention of paying money in."

"And this was recently?"

"Only a few days ago."

Grace pushed her shawl more off her shoulders, as if she were in a heat, and beat her knee up and down as she sat on the low stool. Suddenly she turned to Isaac.

"Had you no suspicion that any thing was wrong?"

"Yes, a slight one," he incautiously answered. "A doubt, though, more than a suspicion."

Grace took up the admission warmly. "And you could hug the doubt slyly to yourself and never warn your father!" she indignantly uttered.

"A fine son, you are, Isaac Hastings!"

Isaac was of equable temperament. He did not retort on Grace that he *had* warned him, but that Mr. Hastings had not acted upon the hint; at least, not effectually. "When my father blames me, it will be time for you to blame me, Grace," was all he said in answer. "And—in my opinion—it might be just as well if you waited to hear whether Maria deserves blame, before you cast so much to her."

"Pshaw!" returned Grace. "The thing speaks for itself."

Had Grace witnessed the bitter sorrow, the prostration, the uncertainty in which her sister was sunk at that moment, she might have been more charitable in her judgment. Practical and straightforward herself, it would have been as impossible for Grace to remain ignorant of her husband's affairs, pecuniary or else, as it was for her to believe that Maria Godolphin had remained so. And, if fully convinced that such had indeed been the fact, Grace would have deemed such a state of contented ignorance to be little less than a crime. She and Maria were constituted as essentially different as two people can well be. Pity but she could have seen Maria then.

Maria was in her dining-room. She had made a pretence of going down to dinner, not to excite the observation and remarks of the servants; in her excessive sensitiveness she could not bear that they should even see she was in grief. Grace, in her place, might have spoken openly and angrily before her household of the state of affairs. Not so Maria: she buried it all within her.

She could not eat. Toying with this plate and that plate, she knew not how to swallow a morsel or to make pretence to do so, before the servants, standing by. But it came to an end, that dinner, and Maria was left alone.

She sat on, musing; her brain racked with busy thoughts. To one of the strangely refined organization of Maria

Hastings, a blow, like that fallen, appeared more terrible than its actuality. Of the *consequences* she as yet knew little, could foresee less; therefore they were not much glanced at by her: but of the disgrace Maria took an exaggerated view. Whether the bank went on again, or not, they seemed to have fallen from their high pedestal; and Maria shrunk with a visible shudder at the bare thought of meeting her friends and acquaintances; at the idea of going out to show herself in the town.

Many would not have minded it; some would not have looked upon it in the light of a disgrace at all: minds and feelings, I say, are constituted differently. Take Mrs. Charlotte Pain, for example. Had she enjoyed the honor of being George Godolphin's wife, she would not have shed a tear, or eaten a meal the less, or abstained by so much as a single day from gladdening the eyes of Prior's Ash. Walking, riding, or driving, Charlotte would have shown herself as usual.

Pierce came in. And Maria lifted her head with a start, and made a pretence of looking up quite carelessly, lest the man should see how full of trouble she was.

"Here's that Mrs. Bond at the door, ma'am," he said. "I can't get rid of her. She declares that you gave her leave to call, and said that you would see her."

Maria seemed to grow hot and cold. That the woman had come for her ten-pound note, she felt convinced, induced to it, perhaps, by the misfortune of the day, and—she had not got it to give her. Maria would have given a great deal for a ten-pound bank-note then.

"I will see her, Pierce," she said. "Let her come in."

Mrs. Bond, civil and sober to-night, came in, curtsying. Maria—ah! that sensitive heart!—felt quite meek and humbled before her; very different from what she would have felt had she had the money to give her. Mrs. Bond asked for it civilly.

"I am sorry that I cannot give it

you to-night," answered Maria. "I will send it to you in a day or two."

"You promised, ma'am, that I should have it whenever I axed," said she.

"I know I did," replied Maria. "If I had it in the house I would give it you know. You shall have it next week."

"Can I have it on Monday?" asked Mrs. Bond.

"Yes," answered Maria. "Shall I send it to you?"

"I'd not give the trouble," said Mrs. Bond. "I'll make bold to step up again and get it, ma'am, on Monday."

"Very well," replied Maria. "If Miss Meta were here, she would ask after the parrot."

"It's beautiful," exclaimed Dame Bond. "It's tail be like a lovely green plume o' feathers. But I ain't got used to its screeching yet. Then I'll be here on Monday, ma'am, if you please."

Maria rang the bell, and Pierce escorted her to the door. To return again on Monday.

Maria Godolphin never deemed that she was not safe in making the promise. Thomas Godolphin would be home then, and she could get the note from him.

And she sat on alone, as before; her mind more troubled, her weary head upon her hand.

CHAPTER XLVI.

A DREAD FEAR.

CAN you picture what were the sensations of Maria Godolphin during that night? No; not unless it has been your lot to pass through such. She went up to her bedroom at the usual time, not to excite any gossip in the household; she undressed herself mechanically; she got into bed. It had been much the custom with herself and George to sleep with the

blinds up. They liked a light room; and a large gas-lamp in Crosse Street threw its full light in. Now she lay with her eyes closed: not courting sleep; she knew that there would be no sleep for her, no continuous sleep, for many and many a night to come: now, she turned on her uneasy bed and lay with her eyes open: any thing for a change in the monotonous hours. The commodious dressing-table, its large glass, its costly ornaments, stood between the windows; she could see its outlines, almost trace the pattern of its white lace drapery over the pink silk. The white window-curtains were looped up with pink; some of the pretty white chairs were finished off with pink braiding. The carpet was of green, with white and pink roses on it. A large cheval-glass swung in a corner. On a console of white marble, its frettings of gilt, stood Maria's Prayer-book and Bible, with Wilson's Supper and Sacra Privata: a book she frequently opened for a few minutes in a morning. A small ornamental bookcase was on the opposite side, containing some choice works culled from the literature of the day. On the table, in the centre of the room, lay a small traveling-desk of George's, which he had left there when packing his things. All these familiar objects, with others, were perfectly clear to Maria's eyes; and yet she saw them not. If the thought intruded that this comfortable bedchamber might not much longer be hers, she did not dwell upon it. That phase of the misfortune had scarcely come. Her chief sensation was one of shivering cold. She felt cold all over,—that nervous coldness which only those who have experienced intense dread or pain of mind, ever have felt. She shivered inwardly and outwardly,—and she said perpetually, "When will the night be gone?" It was only the precursor of worse nights, many of them in store.

Morning dawned at last. Maria watched in the daylight; and lay closing her eyes against the light until

it was the usual time of rising. She got up, shivering still, and unrefreshed. Many a one might have slept through the night, just as usual, have risen renovated, have been none the worse, in short, in spirit or in health, for the blow which had fallen. Charlotte Pain might have slept all the better. *Il y a des femmes et des femmes.*

It was Sunday morning, and the church-bells were giving token of it, as it is customary for them to do at eight o'clock. When Maria got down to breakfast, it was nearly nine. The sun was bright, and the breakfast-table, laid with its usual care, in the pleasant dining-room, was bright also with its china and silver.

Something else looked bright. And that was Miss Meta. Miss Meta came in, following on her mamma's steps, and attended by Margery. Very bright in her Sunday attire,—an embroidered white frock, its sleeves tied up with blue ribbons, and a blue sash. Careful Margery had put a white pinafore over the whole, lest the frock should come to grief at breakfast. On Sunday mornings Meta was indulged with a seat at her papa and mamma's breakfast-table.

The child was a little bit of a gourmand, as it is in the nature of many children at that age to be. She liked nice things very much indeed. Bounding to the breakfast-table, she stood on tiptoe, her chin up, regarding what there might be on it. Maria drew her to her chair apart, and sat down with the child on her knee, to take her morning kiss.

"Have you been a good girl, Meta? Have you said your prayers?"

"Yes," confidently answered Meta to both questions.

"She has said 'em after a fashion," grunted Margery. "It's not much prayers that's got out of her on a Sunday morning, except hurried ones. I had to make her say the Lord's Prayer over twice, she gabbled it so. Her thoughts are fixed on coming down here,—afraid for fear the breakfast should be eat, I suppose."

Maria was in no mood for bestow-

ing admonition. She stroked the child's smooth golden curls fondly, and kissed her pretty lips.

"Where's papa?" asked Meta.

"He is out, dear. Don't you remember? Papa went out yesterday. He has not got home yet."

Meta drew a long face. Papa indulged her more than mamma did, especially in the matter of breakfast. Mamma was apt to say such and such a dainty was not good for Meta: papa helped her to it, whether good for her or not.

Maria put her down. "Set her to the table, Margery. It is cold this morning, is it not?" she added, as Meta was lifted on to a chair.

"Cold!" returned Margery. "Where can your feelings be, ma'am? It's a hot summer's day."

Maria sat down herself to the breakfast-table. Several letters lay before her. On a Sunday morning the letters were brought into the dining-room, and Pierce was in the habit of laying them before his master's place. To-day, he had laid them before Maria's.

She took them up. All, save three, were addressed to the firm. Two bore the private address of George; the third was for Margery.

"Here is a letter for you, Margery," she said, laying the others in a stack, that they might be carried into the bank.

"For me!" returned Margery, taken by surprise. "Are you sure, ma'am?"

For answer, Maria handed her the letter, and Margery, rummaging in her pocket for her spectacles, opened it without ceremony, and stood reading it.

"I dare say! what else wouldn't they like!" was her ejaculatory remark.

"Is it from Scotland, Margery?" asked her mistress.

"It wouldn't be from nowhere else," answered Margery, in vexation. "I have got no other kin to pull and tug at me. They be a-going on to Wales, she an' her son, and she wants me to

meet her on the journey to-morrow, just for an hour's talk. Some people have got consciences! Ride a matter of forty mile, and spend a sight o' money in doing it!"

"Are you speaking of your sister? —Mrs. Bray."

"More's the pity, I am," answered Margery. "Selina was always one of the weak ones, ma'am. She says she has been ill again, feels likely to die, and is going to Wales for some months to her friends, to try if the air will benefit her. She'd be ever grateful for a five-pound note, she adds, not having a penny-piece beyond what will take her to her journey's end. I wonder how much they have had off me in the whole, if it come to be put down!" wrathfully concluded Margery.

"You can have a day's holiday, you know, Margery, if you would wish to meet her on the journey."

"I must take time to consider of it," shortly answered Margery, who was always considerably put out by these applications. "She has been nothing but a trouble to me, ma'am, ever since she married that ne'er-do-well, Bray. Now then! you be a good child, and don't upset the whole cup of coffee over your pinafore, as you did last Sunday morning!"

The parting admonition was addressed to Meta, in conjunction with a slight shake administered to that young lady, under the pretence of re-settling her on her chair. Meta was at once the idol and the torment of Margery's life. Margery withdrew, and Maria, casting her spiritless eyes on the breakfast-table, took a modest piece of dry-toast, and put a morsel into her mouth.

But she found some difficulty in swallowing it. Throat and bread were alike dry. She drew the butter towards her and spread some on the toast, thinking it might mend it. No; no. She could not swallow buttered toast any more than dry. The fault did not lie in the food.

"Would Meta like a nice piece of toast?" she asked.

Meta liked any thing that was good in the shape of estates. She nodded her head several times in succession, by way of answer, her mouth being full. And Maria passed the slice of toast to her.

The breakfast came to an end. Maria took the child on her knee, read her a pretty Bible story, as was her daily after-breakfast custom, talked to her a little, and then sent her to the nursery. She, Maria, sat on alone. She heard the bells ring out for service, but they did not ring for her. Maria Godolphin could no more have shown her face in the church that day than she could have committed some desperately wrong act. Under the disgrace which had fallen upon them, it would have seemed, to her sensitive mind, something like an act of unblushing impudence. She gathered her books around her, and strove to make the best of them alone. Perhaps she had scarcely yet realized the great fact that God *can* be a comforter in the very darkest affliction. Maria's experience that way was yet but limited.

She had told the servants that she would dine in the middle of the day with the child, as their master was out; and at half-past one she sat down to dinner, and made what pretence she could of eating some. Better pretence than she had in the morning, for the servants were present now. She took the wing of a fowl on her plate, and turned it about, and managed to finish all the white meat. Meta made up for her: the young lady partook of the fowl and other things with great relish, showing no signs that her appetite was failing, if her mamma's was.

Later, she was dispatched for a walk with Margery, and Maria was once more alone. She felt not to know what to do with herself: the house seemed too large for her. She wandered from the dining-room to her sitting-room up-stairs; from the sitting-room, across the vestibule, to the drawing-room. She paced its large proportions, her feet sinking into, the

rich velvet-pile carpet; she glanced at the handsome furniture. But she saw nothing: the sense of her eyes, that day, was buried within her.

She felt indescribably lonely; she felt a sense of desertion. Nobody called upon her, nobody came near her; even her brother Reginald had not been. People were not in the habit much of calling on her on a Sunday; but their absence seemed like neglect, in her deep sorrow. Standing for a minute at one of the windows, and looking out mechanically, she saw Isaac pass.

He looked up, discerned her standing there, and nodded. A sudden impulse prompted Maria to make a sign to him to enter. Her brain was nearly wearied out with incertitude and perplexity. All day, all night, had she been wondering how far the calamity would fall; what would be its limit, what its extent. Isaac might be able to tell her something; at present, she was in complete ignorance.

He came up the stairs swiftly, and entered. "Alone!" he said, shaking hands with her. "How are you to-day?"

"Pretty well," answered Maria.

"You were not at church, Maria?"

"No," she answered. "I did not go this morning."

A constrained sort of silence ensued. If Maria waited for Isaac to speak of yesterday's misfortune, she waited in vain. Of all people in the world, he would be the least likely to speak of it to George Godolphin's wife. Maria must do it herself, if she wanted it done.

"Isaac, do you know whether the bank will be open again to-morrow morning?" she began, in a low tone.

"No, I do not."

"Do you *think* it will? I wish you to tell me what you think," she added, in a pointedly earnest tone.

"You should ask your husband for information, Maria. He must be far better able to give it you than I."

She remembered that George had told her she need not mention his having left Prior's Ash until she saw

Thomas Godolphin on Monday morning. Therefore she did not reply to Isaac that she could not ask George, because he was absent. "Isaac, I wish you to tell me," she gravely rejoined. "Any thing you know, or may think."

"I really know very little, Maria. Nothing, in fact, for certain. Prior's Ash is saying that the bank will not open again. The report is that some message of an unfavorable nature was telegraphed down last night by Mr. Godolphin."

"Telegraphed to whom?" she asked, eagerly.

"To Hurde. I cannot say whether there's any foundation for it. Old Hurde's as close as wax. No fear of his propagating it, if it has come, unless it lay in his business to do so. I walked out of church with him, but he did not say a syllable about it to me."

Maria sat a few minutes in silence. "If the bank should not go on, Isaac—what then?"

"Why, then—of course it would not go on," was the very logical answer returned by Mr. Isaac.

"But what would be done, Isaac? How would it end?"

"Well, I suppose there'd be an official winding up of affairs. Perhaps the bank might be reopened afterwards, on a smaller scale. I don't know."

"An official winding up," repeated Maria, her sweet face turned earnestly on her brother's. "Do you mean bankruptcy?"

"Something of that."

A blank pause. "In bankruptcy every thing is sold, is it not? Would these things have to be sold?" looking round upon the costly furniture.

"Things generally are sold in such a case," replied Isaac. "I don't know how it would be in this."

Evidently there was not much to be got out of Isaac. He either did not know, or he would not. Sitting a few minutes longer, he departed—afraid, possibly, how far Maria's questions might extend.

Not long had he been gone, when boisterous steps were heard leaping up the stairs, and Reginald Hastings—noisy, impetuous Reginald—came in. He seized Maria round the waist, and kissed her heartily. Maria spoke reproachfully.

"At home since yesterday morning, and not to have come to see me before!" she exclaimed.

"They wouldn't let me come yesterday," bluntly replied Reginald. "They thought you'd be all down in the mouth with this bother, and would not care to see folks. Another thing: I was in hot water with them."

A faint smile crossed Maria's lips. She could not remember the time when Reginald had *not* come home to plunge into hot water with the powers at the rectory. "What was the matter?" she asked.

"Well, it was the old grievance about my bringing home no traps. Things do melt on a voyage, somehow; and what with one outlet and another for your pay, it's of no use trying to keep square. I say, where's Meta? Gone out? I should have come here as soon as dinner was over, only Rose kept me. I am going to Grace's to tea. She asked me last night. How is George Godolphin? He is out too, I suppose?"

"He is well," replied Maria, passing by the other question. "What length of stay shall you make at home, Reginald?"

"Not long, if I know it. There's a fellow in London looking out for a ship for me. It's as gloomy as ditch-water this time at home. They are regularly cut up about the business here. Will the bank go on again, Maria?"

"I don't know any thing about it, Reginald. I wish I did know."

"I say, Maria," added the thoughtless fellow, lowering his voice, "there's no truth, I suppose, in what Prior's Ash is saying about George Godolphin?"

"What is Prior's Ash saying?" returned Maria.

"Ugly things," answered Reginald.

"I heard something about—about swindling."

"About swindling!"

"Swindling, or forgery, or some queer thing of that sort. I wouldn't listen to it."

Maria grew cold. "Tell me what you heard, Reginald,—as well as you can remember," she said, her unnatural calmness of tone and manner deceiving Reginald, and cloaking all too well her mental agony.

"Tales are going about that there's something wrong with George,—that he has not been doing things upon the square. A bankruptcy's not much, they say, except to the creditors; it can be got over: but if there's any thing worse—why, the question is, will he get over it?"

Maria's heart beat on as if it would burst its bounds; her blood was coursing through her veins with a fiery heat. A few moments of struggle, and then she spoke, still with unnatural calmness.

"It is not likely, Reginald, that such a thing could be true."

"Of course it is not," said Reginald, with impetuous indignation. "If I had thought it was true, I should not have asked you about it, Maria. Why, that class of people have to stand in a dock and be tried, and get imprisoned, and transported, and all the rest of it! That's just like Prior's Ash! If it gets hold of the story to-day that I have come home without my sea-chest, to-morrow it will be saying that I have come home without my head. George Godolphin's a jolly good fellow, and I hope he'll turn round on the lot. Many a time he has helped me out of a hole that I didn't dare tell anybody else of; and I wish he may come triumphant out of this!"

Reginald talked on, but Maria heard him not. An awful fear had been aroused within her. Entire as was her trust in his honor, improbable as the uncertain accusation was, the terrible fear, that something or other might be wrong, took possession of her, and turned her heart to sickness.

"I bought Meta a stuffed monkey

out there," continued Reginald, jerking his head aside to indicate some remote quarter of his travels. "I thought you'd not like me to bring home a live one for her—even if the skipper had allowed it to come in the ship. I came across a stuffed one cheap, and bought it."

Maria roused herself to smile. "Have you brought it to Prior's Ash?"

"Well—no," confessed Reginald, coming down a tone or two. "The fact is, it went with the rest of my things. I'll get her something better next voyage. And now I'm off, Maria, for Grace's tea will be ready. Remember me to George Godolphin. I'll come in and see him to-morrow."

With a commotion, equal to that he had made in ascending, Reginald clattered down, and Maria saw him and his not too good sailor's jacket go swaying up the street towards her sister's. It was the only jacket of any sort Mr. Reginald possessed,—and the only one he was likely to possess, until he could learn to keep himself and his clothes.

Maria, with the new fear at her heart—which, strive as she might to thrust it indignantly from her, to ignore it, to reason herself out of it, *would* continue to be a fear, and a very horrible one—remained alone for the rest of the day. Just before bedtime, Margery came to her.

"I have been turning it over in my mind, ma'am, and come to the conclusion that it might be as well if I do go to meet my sister. She's always on the groan, it's true; but maybe she is bad, and we might never get a chance of seeing each other again. So I think I'll go."

"Very well," said Maria. "Harriet can attend to Miss Meta. What time in the morning must you be away, Margery?"

"By half-past six out of here," answered Margery. "The train goes five minutes before seven. Could you let me have a little money, please, ma'am? I suppose I must give her a pound or two."

Maria felt startled at the request. How was she to comply with it? "I have no money, Margery," said she, her heart beating. "At least, I have but very little,—too little to be of much use to you."

"Then that stops it," returned Margery, with her abrupt freedom. "It's of no good for me to think of going without money."

"Have you none by you?" asked Maria. "It is a pity you must be away before the bank opens in the morning."

Before the bank opens! Was it spoken in thoughtlessness? Or did she merely mean to indicate the hour of arrival of Thomas Godolphin?

"What I have got by me isn't much," said Margery. "A few shillings or so. It might take me there and bring me back again: but Selina will look glum if I don't give her something."

In Maria's purse there remained the sovereign and the seven shillings which George had seen there. She gave the sovereign to Margery, who could, if she chose, give it to her sister. Maria suggested that more could be sent to her by post-office order. Margery's savings, what the Brays had spared, and a small legacy left her by her former mistress, Mrs. Godolphin, were in George's hands. Would she ever see them? It was a question to be solved.

To her bed again, to pass another night such as the last. As the last? Had this night been only as the last, it might have been more calmly borne. The chill coldness, the sleeplessness, the trouble and the pain would have been there, but not the sharp agony, the awful dread she scarcely knew of what, arising from the incautious words of Reginald. It is only by comparison that we can form a true estimate of what is bad, what good. Maria Godolphin would have said, the previous night, that it was impossible for any to be worse than that: now she looked back, and envied it in comparison. There had been the sense of the humiliation,

the disgrace arising from an unfortunate commercial crisis in their affairs; but the worse dread which had come to her now was not so much as dreamt of. Curled up in her bed, shivering like one in mortal cold, lay Maria, her brain alone hot, her mouth dry, her throat parched. When, oh when would the night be gone!

CHAPTER XLVII.

COMPANY TO BREAKFAST.

FAR more unrefreshed did she arise in the morning than on the previous one. The day was charmingly beautiful; the morning hot: but Maria seemed to shake with cold. Margery had gone on her journey, and Harriet, a maid who waited on Maria, attended to the child. Of course, with Margery away, Miss Meta ran riot in having her own will. She chose to breakfast with her mamma: and her mamma, who saw no particular objection, was not in spirits to oppose it.

She was seated at the table opposite Maria, revelling in coffee and good things, instead of plain bread-and-milk. A pretty picture, with her golden hair, her smooth face, and her flushed cheeks. She wore a delicate print-frock, and a white pinafore, the sleeves tied up with a light mauve-colored ribbon, and her pretty little hands and arms were never still above the table. In the midst of her own enjoyment, it appeared, she found leisure to observe that her mamma was taking nothing.

"Mamma, why don't you eat breakfast?"

"I am not hungry, Meta."

"There's Uncle Thomas!" she resumed.

Uncle Thomas! At half-past eight? But Meta was right. That was Mr. Godolphin's voice in the hall, speaking to Pierce. A gleam of something like sunshine darted into Maria's heart. His early arrival seemed to whisper

of a hope that the bank would be re-opened,—though Maria could not have told whence she drew the deduction.

She heard him go into the bank. But, ere many minutes elapsed, he had come out again, and was knocking at the door of the breakfast-room.

“Come in.”

He came in; and a grievous sinking fell upon Maria’s heart as she looked at him. In his pale, sad countenance, bearing too evidently the traces of acute mental suffering, she read a death-blow to her hopes. Rising, she held out her hand, not speaking.

“Uncle Thomas, I’m having breakfast here,” put in a little intruding voice. “I’m having coffee and egg.”

Thomas laid his hand for a moment on the child’s head as he passed her. He took a seat a little way from the table, facing Maria, who turned to him.

“Pierce tells me that George is not here.”

“He went to London on Saturday afternoon,” said Maria. “Did you not see him there?”

“No,” replied Thomas, speaking very gravely.

“He bade me tell you this morning that he had gone—in case he did not see you himself in town.”

“Why has he gone? For what purpose?”

“I do not know,” answered Maria.

“That was all he said to me.”

Thomas had his earnest dark-gray eyes fixed upon her. Their expression did not tend to lessen the sickness at Maria’s heart. “What address has he left?”

“He gave me none,” replied Maria.

“I inferred from what he seemed to intimate, that he would be very soon home again. I can scarcely remember what it was he really did say, his departure was so hurried. I knew nothing of it until he had packed his trunk. He said he was going to town on business, and that I was to tell you on Monday morning.”

“What trunk did he take?”

“The large one.”

“Then he must be thinking of staying some time.”

It was the same thought which had several times occurred to Maria. “The trunk was addressed to the railway terminus in London, I remember,” she said. “He did not take it with him. It was sent up by the night-train.”

“Then, in point of fact, you can give me no information about him, except this?”

“No,” she answered, feeling, she could scarcely tell why, rather ashamed of having to make the confession. But it was no fault of hers. Thomas Godolphin rose to retire.

“I’m having breakfast with mamma, Uncle Thomas!” persisted the little, busy tongue. “Margery’s gone for all day. Perhaps I shall have dinner with mamma.”

“Hush, Meta,” said Maria, speaking in a sadly subdued manner, as if the chatter, intruded into their seriousness, were more than she could bear. “Thomas, is the bank going on again? Will it be opened to-day?”

“It will never go on again,” was Thomas Godolphin’s answer; and Maria quite shrank from the lively pain of the tone in which the words were spoken.

There was a blank pause. Maria became conscious that Thomas had turned and was looking gravely, it may be said searchingly, at her face.

“You have known nothing, I presume, Maria, of—of the state that affairs were getting into? You were not in George’s confidence?”

She returned the gaze with honest openness, something like wonder shining forth from her soft brown eyes. “I have known nothing,” she answered. “George never spoke to me upon business matters: he never would.”

No: Thomas felt sure that he had not. He was turning again to leave the room, when Maria, her voice a timid one, a delicate blush rising to

her cheeks, asked if she could have some money.

"I have none to give you, Maria."

"I expect Mrs. Bond here after her ten-pound note. I don't know what I shall do, unless I can have it to give her. George told me I could have it from you this morning."

Thomas Godolphin did not understand. Maria explained—about her having taken care of the note, and that George had borrowed it on Saturday. Thomas shook his head. He was very sorry, he said, but he could do nothing in it.

"It is not like a common debt," Maria ventured to urge. "It was the woman's own money, entrusted to me for safe keeping, on the understanding that she should claim it whenever she pleased. I should be so much obliged to you to let me have it."

"You do not understand me, Maria. It is no want of will on my part. I have not the money."

Maria's color was gradually receding from her face, leaving in its place something that looked like terror. She would have wished to pour forth question after question.—Has all our money gone? Are we quite ruined? Has George done any thing very wrong?—but she did not. In her refined sensitiveness she had not the courage to put such questions to Thomas Godolphin: perhaps she had not the courage yet to encounter the probable answers.

Thomas left the room, saying no more. He would not pain her by speaking of the utter ruin which had come upon them, the disgraceful ruin; of the awful trouble looming down, in which she must be a sufferer equally with himself; perhaps, she the greatest sufferer. Time enough for it. Maria sat down in her place again, a dull mist before her eyes and in her heart.

"Mamma, I've eaten my egg. I want some of that."

Meta's finger was stretched towards the ham at the foot of the table. Maria rose mechanically to cut her

some. There was no saying this morning, "That is not good for Meta." Her heart was utterly bowed down beyond resistance, or thought of it. She placed a slice of ham on a plate, cut it into little pieces, and laid it before that eager young lady.

"Mamma, I'd like some buttered roll."

The roll was supplied also. What would not Maria have supplied, if asked for? All these common-place trifles appeared so pitifully insignificant beside the dreadful trouble come upon them.

"A bit more sugar, please, mamma."

Before any answer could be given to this latter demand, either in word or action, a tremendous summons at the hall-door resounded through the house. Maria shrank from its sound. A fear, she knew not of what, had taken up its place within her, some strange, undefined dread, connected with her husband.

Her poor heart need not have beaten so; her breath need not have been held, her ears strained to listen. Pierce threw open the dining-room door, and there rushed in a lady, all demonstrative sympathy and eagerness. A lady in a handsome light Cashmere shawl, which spread itself over her dress and nearly covered it, and a pork-pie straw hat, with an upright scarlet tuft, or plume.

It was Charlotte Pain. She seized Maria's hand and impulsively asked what she could do for her. "I knew it would be so!" she volubly exclaimed,—“that you'd be looking like a ghost. That's the worst of you, Mrs. George Godolphin! You let any trifle worry you. The moment I got the letters in this morning, and found how nasty things were turning out for your husband, I said to myself, 'There'll be Mrs. George in the dumps finely!' And I flung this shawl on to cover my toilette, for I was not en grande tenue, and came off to cheer you, and see if I could be of any use."

Charlotte flung her shawl off as she spoke, ignoring ceremony. She had

taken the chair vacated by Thomas Godolphin, and with a dexterous movement of the hands, the shawl fell behind her, disclosing the "toilette." A washed-out muslin skirt of no particular color, tumbled, and a little torn; and some strange-looking thing above it, neither a jacket nor a body, its shade a bright yellow and its buttons purple glass, the whole dirty and stained.

"You are very kind," answered Maria, with a shrinking spirit and a voice that faltered. Two points in Mrs. Pain's words had struck upon her ominously. The mention of the letters, and the hint conveyed in the expression, things turning out "nasty" for George. "Have you heard from him?" she continued.

"Heard from him!—how could I?" returned Charlotte. "London letters don't come in this morning. What should he have to write to me about, either? I have heard from another quarter, and I have heard the rumors in Prior's Ash."

"Will you tell me what you have heard?" rejoined Maria.

"Well," said Charlotte, in a friendly tone, as she leaned towards her, "I suppose the docket will be struck today,—if it is not struck already. The Philistines are down on the house, and mean to declare it bankrupt."

Maria sat in blank dismay. She understood but little of these business matters. Charlotte was quite at home in such things. "What will be the proceedings?" Maria asked, after a pause. "What do they do?"

"Oh, there's a world of bother," returned Charlotte. "It will drive quiet Thomas Godolphin crazy. The books have all to be gone through and accounts of moneys rendered. The worst is, they'll come here and set down every individual thing in the house, and then leave a man in to see that nothing's moved. That agreeable item in the business I dare say you may expect this morning."

Let us give Charlotte her due. She had really come in a sympathizing friendly spirit to Maria Godolphin,

and in no other. It may be, that Charlotte rather despised her for being so simple and childish in the ways of the world, but that was only the more reason why she should help her if she could. Every word of information that Mrs. Pain was giving, was as a dagger-prick in Maria's heart. Charlotte had no suspicion of this. Had a similar calamity happened to herself, she would have discussed it freely with all the world: possessing no extreme sensibility of feeling, she did not understand it in another. For Maria to talk of the misfortune, let its aspect be ever so bad, seemed to Charlotte perfectly natural.

Charlotte leaned closer to Maria, and spoke in a whisper. "Is there any thing you'd like to put away?"

"To put away?" repeated Maria, not awake to the drift of the argument.

"Because you had better give it to me at once. Spoons, or plate of any sort, or your own jewelry,—any little things that you may want to save. I'll carry them away under my shawl. Never mind how heavy they are. Don't you understand me?" she added, seeing the blank perplexity on Maria's face. "If once those harping men come in, you can't move or hide a single article, but you might put the whole house away now, if you could get it out."

"But suppose it were known?" asked Maria.

"Then there'd be a row," was Charlotte's candid answer. "Who's to know it? Look at that little stuffer?"

Meaning Miss Meta, who was filling her mouth pretty quickly with the pieces of ham, seemingly with great relish.

"Is it good, child?" said Charlotte.

For answer, Meta nodded her head, too busy to speak. Maria, as in civility bound, invited her visitor to take some,—some breakfast.

"I don't care if I do," said Charlotte. "I was just going to breakfast when I came off to you. Look here, Mrs. George Godolphin. I'll

help myself: you go meanwhile and make up a few parcels for me. Just what you set most value by, you know."

"I should be afraid," answered Maria.

"What is there to be afraid of?" asked Charlotte, opening her eyes. "They'll be safe enough at the Folly. That is Lady Godolphin's,—her private property. The bankruptcy can't touch that,—as it will this place and Ashlydyat."

"Ashlydyat!" broke from Maria's lips.

"Ashlydyat will have to go, of course, and every thing in it. At the same time that those harpies walk in here, another set will walk into Ashlydyat. I should like to see Janet's face when they arrive! You make haste, and put up all you can. There may be no time to lose."

"I do not think it would be right," debated Maria.

"Stuff and nonsense about 'right'! Such things are done every day. I dare say you have many little valuables that you'd rather keep than lose."

"I have many that it would be a great grief to me to lose."

"Well, go and put them together. I will take every care of them, and return them to you when the affair has blown over."

Maria hesitated. To her honorable mind there appeared to be something like fraud in attempting such a thing. "Will you allow me just to ask Thomas Godolphin if I may do it?" she said.

Charlotte Pain began to believe that Maria must be an idiot. "Ask Thomas Godolphin! You *would* get an answer! Why, Mrs. George, you know what Thomas Godolphin is,—with his strait-laced principles! He would cut himself in two, rather than save a button, if it was not legally his to save. I believe if by the stroke of a pen he could make it appear that Ashlydyat could not be touched, he'd not make the stroke. Were you to go with such a question to Thomas Godolphin, he'd order you, in his brother's name, not to put aside as much as a ten-and-sixpenny ring.

You must do it without the knowledge of Thomas Godolphin."

"Then I think I would rather not do it," said Maria. "Thank you all the same, Mrs. Pain."

Mrs. Pain shrugged her shoulders with a movement of contempt, threw off the pork-pie, and drew her chair to the breakfast-table. Maria poured out some coffee, and helped her to what she chose to take.

"Are you sure the—the people you speak of will be in the house to-day?" asked Maria.

"I suppose they will."

"I wish George would come back!" involuntarily broke from Maria's lips.

"He'd be a great donkey if he did," said Charlotte. "He's safer where he is."

"Safer from what?" quickly asked Maria.

"From bother. I should not come if I were George. I should let them fight the battle out without me. Mrs. George Godolphin," added Charlotte, meaning to be good-natured, "you had better reconsider your resolve and let me save you a few things. Not a stick or stone will be saved. This will be a dreadful failure, and you won't be spared. They'll take every trinket you possess, leaving you nothing but your wedding-ring."

Maria could not be persuaded. She seemed altogether in a fog, understanding little: but she felt that what Charlotte proposed would not be within the strict rules of right.

"They'll poke their noses into drawers and boxes,—into every hole and corner in the house; and from that time forth the things are not yours, but theirs," persisted Charlotte, for her information.

"I cannot help it," sighed Maria. "I wish George was here!"

"At any rate, you'll do one thing," said Charlotte. "You'll let me carry off the child for the day. It will not be a pleasant sight for her, young as she is, to witness a lot of great hulking men going through the rooms, noting down the furniture. I'll take her back with me."

Maria made no immediate reply. She did not particularly like the companionship of Mrs. Pain for Meta. Charlotte saw her hesitation.

"Are you thinking she will be a trouble? Nothing of the sort. I shall be glad to have her for the day, and it is as well to spare her such sights. I am sure her papa would say so."

Maria thought he would, and she thought how kind Mrs. Pain was. Charlotte turned to Meta.

"Will Meta come and spend the day at Lady Godolphin's Folly?—and have a high swing made between the trees, and go out in the carriage in the afternoon and buy sugar-plums?"

Meta looked dubious, and honored the invitation-giver with a full stare in the face. Notwithstanding the swing and the sugar-plums,—both very great attractions indeed to Meta,—certain reminiscences of her last visit to the Folly were intruding themselves.

"Are the dogs there?" asked she.

Charlotte gave a most decided shake of the head, putting down her coffee-cup to do it. "The dogs are gone," she said. "They were naughty dogs to Meta, and they have been shut up in the pit-hole, and can never come out again."

"Never, never?" inquired Meta, her wide-open eyes as earnest as her tongue.

"Never," said Charlotte. "The great big pit-hole lid's fastened down with a strong brass chain,—a chain as thick as Meta's arm. It is all right," added Charlotte, in an aside whisper to Maria, while pretending to reach over the breakfast-table for an egg-spoon. "She shan't as much as hear the dogs. I'll have them fastened in the stable. We'll have such a beautiful swing, Meta!"

Meta gobbled down the remainder of her breakfast and slid off her chair. Reassured upon the subject of the dogs, she was eager to be off at once to the pleasures of the swing. Maria rang for Harriet, and gave orders that she should be dressed.

"Let her come in this frock," said

Charlotte. "There's no knowing what damage it may undergo before the day's out."

Meta was taken away by Harriet. Charlotte finished her breakfast, and Maria sat burying her load of care, even from the eyes of friendly Charlotte. "Do you like my Garibaldi shirt?" suddenly asked the latter.

"Like what?" questioned Maria, not catching the name.

"This," replied Charlotte, indicating the yellow article by a touch. "They are new things just come up: Garibaldi shirts they are called. Mrs. Verrall sent me three down from London: a yellow, a scarlet, and a blue. They are all the rage, she says. Do you admire it?"

But for Maria's innate politeness, and perhaps for the sadness beating at her heart, she would have answered that she did not admire it at all: that it looked an untidy, shapeless thing. Charlotte continued, without waiting for a reply:

"You don't see it to advantage. It is soiled, and has lost a button or two. Those dogs make horrid work of my things, with their roughness and their dirty paws. Look at this great rent in my dress which I have pinned up! Pluto did that this morning. He is getting fearfully savage, now he's old."

"You must not allow them to frighten Meta," said Maria, somewhat anxiously. "She should not see them."

"I have told you she shall not. Can't you trust me? The dogs——"

Charlotte paused. Meta came bursting in, ready; in her large straw hat with its flapping brim, and her cool, brown-holland over-dress. Charlotte rose, drew her shawl about her shoulders, and carried the pork-pie to the chimney-glass, to settle it on. Then she took Meta by the hand, said good morning, and sailed out, the effect of her visit having been partly to frighten, partly to perplex, Maria.

Meta came running back, all in a bustle, Charlotte following her. She had escaped from Charlotte's hand as

Pierce was opening the street-door. "Mamma, you have not read me a Bible story!" Meta could not remember when that customary after-breakfast routine had been dispensed with before, and was surprised.

"No, darling. Perhaps I can read you one to-night."

"As if Bible stories did any good to children so young as Meta!" remarked Charlotte, tossing up the scarlet tuft. "It's quite a waste of time, Mrs. George Godolphin. I'd rather amuse a child of mine with half a column of *Bell's Life*."

Maria made no answering reply. She kissed again the little face held up to her, and they finally departed. Maria rang for the breakfast-things to be removed. It was soon done, and then she sat on with her load of care, and her new apprehensions. These agreeable visitors that Charlotte warned her of—she wondered that Thomas had not mentioned it. Would they take all the clothes she had up-stairs, leaving her only what she stood upright in? Would they take Meta's? Would they take her husband's out of his drawers and places? Would they take the keeper off her finger? It was studded with diamonds. Charlotte had said they would only leave her her wedding-ring. These thoughts were troubling and perplexing her; but only in a degree. Compared to that other terrible thought, they were as nothing,—the uncertain fear regarding her husband which had been whispered to her by the careless sailor, Reginald Hastings.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

BEARING THE BRUNT.

THOMAS GODOLPHIN sat in the bank-parlor, bearing the brunt of the shock. With his pain upon him, mental and bodily, he was facing all the trouble that George ought to have faced:

the murmurs, the questions, the reproaches.

All was known. All was known to Thomas Godolphin. Not alone to him. Could Thomas have kept the terrible facts within his own breast, have shielded his brother's reputation still, he would have done it: but that was impossible. In becoming known to Mr. Godolphin, it had become known to others. The discovery had been made jointly, by Thomas and by certain business gentlemen, when he was in London on the Saturday afternoon. Treachery upon treachery! The long course of deceit on George Godolphin's part had come out. Falsified books, wrongly rendered accounts, good securities replaced by false, false balance-sheets. Had Thomas Godolphin been less blindly trustful in George's honor and integrity, it could never have been so effectually accomplished. George Godolphin was the acting manager: and Thomas, in his perfect trust, combined with his failing health, had left things latterly almost entirely in George's hands. "What business had he so to leave them?" people were asking now. Perhaps Thomas's own conscience was asking the same. But why should he not have left things to him, considering that he placed in him the most implicit confidence? Surely, no unprejudiced man would say Thomas Godolphin had been guilty of imprudence. George was fully equal to the business confided to him, in point of power, of capacity; and it could not certainly matter which of the brothers, equal partners, equal heads of the firm, took its practical management. It would seem not: and yet they were blaming Thomas Godolphin now.

Failures of this nature have been recorded before, where fraud has played its part. We have only to look to the records of our law courts—criminal, bankruptcy, and civil—for examples. To transcribe the precise means by which George Godolphin had contrived to bear on in a course of deceit, to elude the suspicion of the

world in general, and the vigilance of his own house, would only be to recapitulate what has often been told in the public papers; and told to so much more purpose than I could tell it. It is rather with what may be called the domestic phrase of these tragedies that I would deal: the private, home details, the awful wreck of peace, of happiness caused *there*. The world knows enough (rather too much, sometimes) of the public part of these affairs; but what does it know of the part behind the curtain?—the, if it may be so said, inner aspect?

I knew a gentleman years ago who was a partner in a country banking-house,—a sleeping partner; and the bank failed,—failed through a long-continued course of treachery on the part of one connected with it,—something like that described to you as pursued by Mr. George Godolphin. This gentleman (of whom I tell you) was to be held responsible for the losses, creditors and others decided, the real delinquent having disappeared,—escaped beyond their reach. They lavished upon him harsh names: rogue, thief, swindler! while, in point of fact, he was as innocent and unconscious of what had happened as they were. He gave up all he had; the bulk of his means had gone with the bank; and he went out of the hearing of his abusers for a while, until things should be smoother,—perhaps the bad man caught. A short time, and he became ill, and a medical man was called in to him. Another short time, and he was *dead*; and the doctors said—I heard them say it—that his malady had been brought on by grief; that he had, in fact, died of a broken heart. He was a kindly gentleman; a good husband, a good father, a good neighbor; a single-hearted, honest man; the very soul of kindness and honor: but he was misjudged by those who ought to have known him better; and he died for it. I wonder what the real rogue felt when he heard of the death? He was a relative. There are many such cases in the world; where reproachful abuse

is levelled at one whose heart is breaking.

There appeared to be little doubt that George Godolphin's embarrassments had commenced years ago. It is more than probable that the money borrowed from Verrall during that short sojourn in Homberg had been its precursor. Once in the hands of the clever charlatan, the crafty, unscrupulous bill-discounter, who grew fat on the folly of others, his downward course was perhaps not easy or swift, but at all events sure. If George Godolphin had but been a little more clear-sighted, the evil might never have come. Could he but have seen Verrall at the first onset, as he was,—not the gentleman, the good-hearted man, as George credulously believed, but the low fellow who traded on the needs of others, the designing sharper, looking ever after his prey,—George would have flung him far away, with no other feeling than contempt. George Godolphin was not born a rogue. George was by nature a gentleman, and an open-handed one, too; but, once in the clutches of Verrall, he was no more able to escape than are the unhappy flies who go buzzing against the shining papers placed to catch them, and there stick. Bit by bit, step by step, gradually, imperceptibly, George found himself stuck. He awoke to the fact that he could neither stir upwards nor downwards. He could not extricate himself; he could not go on without exposure; Verrall, or Verrall's agents, those working in concert with him, though not ostensibly, stopped the supplies, and George was in a fix. Then began the frauds upon the bank. Slightly at first. It was only a choice between that and exposure. Between that and ruin, it may be said, for George's liabilities were so great, that, if brought to a climax, they must then have caused the bank to stop, involving Thomas in ruin as well as himself. In his sanguine temperament, too, he was always hoping that some lucky turn would redeem the bad and bring all to rights again. It was Verrall who

urged him on. It was Verrall who, with Machiavellian craft, made the wrong appear the right; it was Verrall who had filled his pockets with the emptiness of George's. That Verrall had been the arch-tempter, and George the arch-dupe, was clear as the sun at noonday to those who were behind the scenes. Unfortunately, but very few were behind the scenes so far—they might be counted by units—and Verrall and Co. could still blazon it before the world.

The wonder was, where the money had gone. It very often is the wonder in these cases,—a wonder too often never solved. An awful amount of money had gone in some way; the mystery was, how. George Godolphin had kept up a large establishment; had been personally extravagant, privately as well as publicly; but that did not serve to account for the half of the money missing; not for a quarter of it; nay, scarcely for a tithe. Had it been to save himself from hanging, George himself could not have told how or where it had gone. When the awful sum total came to be added up, to stare him in the face, he looked at it in blank amazement. And he had no good to show for it—none; the money had melted, and he could not tell how.

Of course, it had gone to the discounters. The tide of discounting once set in, it was something like the nails in the horse-shoe, doubling, and doubling, and doubling. The money went, and there was nothing to show for it: little marvel that George Godolphin stood aghast at the sum total of the whole, when the amount was raked up,—or as near the amount as could be guessed at. When George could no longer furnish legitimate funds on his own account, the bank was laid under contribution to supply them, and George had to enter upon a system of ingenuity to hide the outgoings. When those contributions had been levied to the very utmost extent compatible with safety, with the avoidance of sudden and immediate non-discovery, and George was

at his wits' end for money, which he *must* have, then Verrall whispered of a way which George at first revolted from, but which resulted in the taking of the deeds of Lord Averil. Had the crash not come as it did, other deeds might have been taken. It is impossible to say. Such a course once entered on is always down hill. Like some other downward courses, the only safety lies in not yielding to it at the first temptation.

Strange to say, George Godolphin could not see the rogue's part played by Verrall; or at best, he saw it but very imperfectly. And yet, not strange, for there are many of these cases in the world. George had been on intimate terms of friendship with Verrall; had been *liè*, it may be said, with him and Lady Godolphin's Folly. Mrs. Verrall was pretty. Charlotte had her attractions. Altogether, George believed yet in Verrall. Let the dagger's point be but decked tastefully with flowers, and men will rush blindly on to it.

Thomas Godolphin sat, some books before him, pondering the one weighty question—where could all the money have gone? Until the present moment, this morning, when he had the books before him and his thoughts were more practically directed to business details, he had been pondering another weighty question,—where had George's integrity gone? Whither had flown his pride in his fair, good name, the honor of the Godolphins? From the Saturday afternoon when the dreadful truth came to light, Thomas had had little else in his thoughts. It was his companion through the Sunday, through the night journey afterwards down to Prior's Ash. He was more fit to be in his bed than to take that journey; but he must face the exasperated men from whom George had flown.

He was facing them now. People had been coming in since nine o'clock with their reproaches, and Thomas Godolphin bore them patiently and answered them meekly,—the tones of his voice low, subdued, as if they came

from the sadness of a stricken heart. He felt their wrongs keenly. Could he have paid these injured men by cutting himself to pieces, and satisfied them with the "pound of flesh," he would have done so, oh, how willingly! He would have sacrificed his life and his happiness (his happiness!), and done it cheerfully, if by that means they could have been paid.

"It's nothing but a downright swindle. I'll say it sir, to your face, and I can't help saying it. Here I bring the two thousand pound in my hand, and I say to Mr. George Godolphin, 'Will it be safe?' 'Yes,' he answers me, 'it will be safe.' And now the bank has shut itself up, and where's my money?"

The speaker was Barnaby, the corn-dealer. What was Thomas Godolphin to answer?

"You told me, sir, on Saturday, that the bank would open again to-day for business,—that the customers would be paid in full."

"I told you but what I believed," rose the quiet voice of Thomas Godolphin in answer. "Mr. Barnaby, believe me, this blow has come upon no one more unexpectedly than it has upon me."

"Well, sir, I don't know what may be your mode of carrying on business, but I should be ashamed to conduct mine so as to let ruin come slap upon me and not to have seen it coming."

Again, what was Thomas Godolphin to answer? Generous to the end, he would not say, "My brother has played us both, alike, false." "If I find that any care or caution of mine could have averted this, Mr. Barnaby, I shall carry the remorse to my grave," was all he said.

"What sort of a dividend will there be?" went on the dealer.

"I really cannot tell you yet, Mr. Barnaby. I have no idea. We must have time to go through the books."

"Where is Mr. George Godolphin?" resumed the applicant; and it was a very natural question. "Mr. Hurde says he is away, but it is strange he

should be away at such a time as this. I should like to ask him a question or two."

"He is in London," replied Thomas Godolphin.

"But what's he gone to London for now? And when is he coming back?"

More puzzling questions. Thomas had to bear the pain of many such that day. He did not say, "My brother is gone we know not why; in point of fact, he has run away." He spoke aloud the faint hopes that rose within his own breast,—that some train, ere the day was over, would bring him back to Prior's Ash.

"Don't you care, Mr. Godolphin," came the next wailing plaint, "for the ruin that the loss of this money will bring upon me? I have a wife and children, sir."

"I do care," Thomas answered, his throat husky and a mist in his eyes. "For every pang that this calamity will inflict on others, it inflicts two on me."

Mr. Hurde, who was busy with more books in his own department, in conjunction with some clerks, came in to ask a question, his pen behind his ear; and Mr. Barnaby, seeing no good to be derived from stopping, went out. Little respite had Thomas Godolphin. The next to come in was Rector of All Souls'.

"What is to become of me?" was his saluting question, spoken in his clear, decisive tone. "How am I to refund this money to the little Chisholms?"

Thomas Godolphin had no satisfactory reply to make. He missed the friendly hand held out hitherto in greeting. Mr. Hastings did not take a chair, but stood up near the table, firm, stern, uncompromising.

"I hear George is off," he continued.

"He is gone to London, Maria informs me," replied Thomas Godolphin.

"Mr. Godolphin, can you sit there and tell me that you had no suspicion

of the way things were turning? That this ruin has come on, and you ignorant?"

"I had no suspicion; none whatever. None can be more utterly surprised than I. There are moments when a feeling comes over me that it cannot be true."

"Could you live in intimate association with your brother, and not see that he was turning out a rogue and vagabond?" went on the rector, in his keenest and most cynical tone.

"I knew nothing, I suspected nothing," was the quiet reply of Thomas.

"How *dared* he take that money from me the other night, when he knew that he was on the verge of ruin?" asked Mr. Hastings. "He took it from me; he never entered it in the books; he applied it, there's no doubt, to his own infamous purposes. When a suspicion was whispered to me afterwards that the bank was wrong, I came here to him. I candidly spoke of what I had heard, and asked him to return me the money, as a friend, a relative. Did he return it? No; his answer was a false, plausible assurance that the money and the bank were alike safe. What does he call it? Robbery? It is worse; it is deceit, fraud, vile swindling. In the old days, many a man has swung for less, Mr. Godolphin."

Thomas Godolphin could not gain-say it.

"Nine thousand and forty-five pounds!" continued the rector. "How am I to make it good? How am I to find money only for the education of Chisholm's children? He confided them and their money to me; and how have I repaid the trust?"

Every word he spoke was as a dagger entering the heart of Thomas Godolphin. He could only sit still and bear. Had the malady that was carrying him to the grave never before shown itself, the days of anguish he had now entered on would have been sufficient to induce it.

"If I find that Maria knew of this, that she was in league with her husband to deceive me, I shall feel in-

clined to discard her from my affections from henceforth," resumed the indignant rector. "It was an unlucky day when I gave my consent to her marrying George Godolphin. I never liked his addressing her. It must have been instinct warned me against it."

"I am convinced that Maria has known nothing," said Thomas Godolphin. "She——"

Mr. Godolphin stopped. Angry sounds had arisen outside, and presently the door was violently opened, and quite a crowd of clamorous people came in, ready to abuse Thomas Godolphin, George not being there to receive the abuse. There was no question but that day's work took weeks from his short span of remaining life. Could a man's heart break summarily, Thomas Godolphin's would have broken then. Many men would have retaliated: *he* felt their griefs, their wrongs, as keenly as they did. They told him of their ruin, of the desolation, the misery it would bring to them, to their wives and families; some spoke in a respectful tone of quiet plaint, some were loud, unreasonable, half-insulting. They demanded to know what dividend there would be; some asked in a covert tone to have their bit of money returned in full; some gave vent to most unorthodox language touching George Godolphin; they openly expressed their opinion that Thomas was conniving at his absence; they hinted that he was as culpable as the other.

None of them appeared to glance at the great fact—that Thomas Godolphin was the greatest sufferer of all. If they had lost part of their means, he had lost all of his. Did they remember that this terrible misfortune, which they were blaming him for, would leave him a beggar upon the face of the earth? He, a gentleman born to wealth, to Ashlydyat, to a position of standing in the county, to honor, to respect? It had all been rent away by the blow, leaving him homeless and penniless, sick with an incurable malady. Had they but re-

flected, they might have found that Thomas Godolphin deserved their condolence rather than their abuse.

But they were in no mood to reflect, or to spare him in their angry feelings. They gave vent to all the soreness within them,—and perhaps it was excusable.

The rector of All Souls' had had his say, and he strode forth. Making his way to the dining-room, he knocked sharply with his stick on the door, and then entered. Maria rose up and came forward, something very like terror on her face. The knock had frightened her: it had conjured up visions of the visitors suggested by Mrs. Charlotte Pain.

"Where is George Godolphin?"

"He is in London, papa," she answered, her heart sinking at the stern tone, the abrupt greeting.

"When do you expect him home?"

"I do not know. He did not tell me when he went, except that he should be home soon. Will you not sit down, papa?"

"No. When I brought that money here the other night, the nine thousand and forty-five pounds," he continued, touching her shoulder to command her full attention, "could you not have opened your lips to tell me that it would be safer in my own house than in this?"

Maria was seized with an inward trembling. She could not bear to be spoken to in that stern tone by her father. "Papa, I could not tell you. I did not know it."

"Do you wish to tell me that you knew nothing—*nothing*—of the state of your husband's affairs, of the ruin that was impending?"

"I knew nothing," she answered. "Until the bank closed on Saturday, I was in total ignorance that any thing was wrong. I never had the remotest suspicion of it."

"Then, I think, Maria, you ought to have had it. Rumor says that you are owing a great deal of money in the town for your personal necessaries, housekeeping and the like."

"There is a good deal owing, I

fear," she answered. "George has not given me the money to pay regularly of late, as he used to do."

"And did *that* not serve to open your eyes?"

"No," she faintly said. "I never cast a thought to any thing being wrong."

She spoke meekly, softly, something like Thomas Godolphin had spoken. The rector looked at her pale, sad face, and perhaps a feeling of pity for his daughter came over him, however bitter he may have felt towards her husband.

"Well, it is a terrible thing for us all," he said, in a kinder voice, as he turned to move away.

"Will you not wait, and sit down, papa?"

"I have not the time now. Good-day, Maria."

As he went out, there stood, gathered against the wall, waiting to go in, Mrs. Bond. Her face was rather red this morning, and a perfume—certainly not of plain water—might be detected in her vicinity. Her snuffy-black gown went down in a reverence as he passed. The rector of All Souls' strode on. Care was too great at his heart to allow of his paying attention to extraneous things, even though they appeared in the shape of attractive Mrs. Bond.

CHAPTER XLIX.

A FIERY TRIAL.

MARIA GODOLPHIN, her face buried on the sofa cushions, where she had sunk on the departure of the Reverend Mr. Hastings, was giving way to the full tide of unhappy thought induced by that gentleman's words, when she became aware that she was not alone. A sound, half a grunt, half a sob, coming from near the door, aroused her. There stood a lady, in a crushed bonnet and unwholesome stuff gown that had once been black, with a red

face; and a perfume of strong waters around her.

Maria rose from the sofa, her heart sinking. How should she meet this woman? how find an excuse for the money which she had not to give? "Good-morning, Mrs. Bond."

Mrs. Bond took a few steps forward, and held on by the table. Not that she was past the power of holding herself; her face must be redder than it was, by some degrees, ere she lost that; but she had a knack of holding on to things.

"I have come for my ten-pound note, if you please, ma'am."

Few can imagine what this moment was to Maria Godolphin; for few are endowed with the sensitiveness of temperament, the refined consideration for the feelings of others, the acute sense of justice, which characterized her. Maria would willingly have given a hundred pounds to have had ten then. How she made the revelation, she scarcely knew,—that she had not the money that morning to give.

Mrs. Bond's face turned rather defiant. "You told me to come down for it, ma'am."

"I thought I could have given it to you. I am very sorry. I must trouble you to come when Mr. George Godolphin shall have returned home."

"Is he going to return?" asked Mrs. Bond, in a quick, hard tone. "Folks is saying that he isn't."

Maria's heart beat painfully at the words. *Was he going to return?* She could only say aloud that she hoped he would very soon be home.

"But I want my money," resumed Mrs. Bond, standing her ground. "I must have it, ma'am, if you please."

"I have not got it," said Maria. "The very instant I have it it shall be returned to you."

"I'd make bold to ask, ma'am, what right you had to spend it. Warn't there enough money in the bank of other folks's as you might have took, without taking mine—which you had promised to keep faithful for me?" reiterated Mrs.

Bond, warming with her subject. "I warn't a deposit in the bank, as them folks was, and I'd no right to have my money took. I want to pay my rent to-day, and to get in a bit o' food. The house is bare of every thing. There's the parrot a-screeching out for seed."

It is of no use to pursue the interview. Mrs. Bond grew bolder and more abusive. But for having partaken rather largely of that cordial which was giving out its scent upon the atmosphere, she had never so spoken to her clergyman's daughter. Maria received it meekly, her heart aching: she felt very much as did Thomas Godolphin,—that she had earned the reproaches. But endurance has its limits: she began to feel really ill; and she saw, besides, that Mrs. Bond appeared to have no intention of departing. Escaping out of the room in the midst of a fierce speech, she encountered Pierce, who was crossing the hall.

"Go into the dining-room, Pierce," she whispered, "and try and get rid of Mrs. Bond. She is not quite herself this morning, and—and—she talks too much. But be kind and civil to her, Pierce: let there be no disturbance."

Her pale face, as she spoke, was lifted to the butler almost pleadingly. He thought how wan and ill his mistress looked. "I'll manage it, ma'am," he said, turning to the dining-room.

By what process Pierce did manage it, was best known to himself. There was certainly no disturbance. A little talking, and Maria thought she heard the sound of something liquid being poured into a glass, as she stood out of view behind the turning at the back of the hall. Then Pierce and Mrs. Bond issued forth, the best friends imaginable, the latter smacking her lips and talking amiably.

Maria came out from her hiding-place, but only to encounter some one who had pushed in at the hall-door as Mrs. Bond left it. A little man in a white neckcloth. He advanced straight to Mrs. George Godolphin.

"Can I speak a word to you, ma'am, if you please?" he asked, taking off his hat.

She could only answer in the affirmative, and she led the way to the dining-room. She wondered who he was: his face seemed familiar to her. The first words he spoke told her, and she remembered him as the head assistant at the linendraper's where she chiefly dealt. He had been sent to press for the payment of the account. She could only tell him as she had told Mrs. Bond,—that she was unable to pay it.

"Mr. Jones would be so very much obliged to you, ma'am," he civilly urged. "It has been standing now some little time, and he hopes you will stretch a point to pay him. If you could only give me part of it, he would be glad."

"I have not got it to give," said Maria, telling the truth in her unhappiness. She could but be candid: she was unable to fence with them, to use subterfuge, as others might have done. She spoke the truth, and spoke it meekly. When Mr. George Godolphin came home she hoped she should pay them, she said. The messenger took the answer, losing none of his respectful manner, and departed.

But all were not so civil; and many found their way to her that day. Once a thought came across her to send them into bank; but she remembered Thomas Godolphin's failing health, and the battle he had to fight on his own account. Besides, these claims were for personalities,—debts owing by herself and George. In the afternoon, Pierce came in and said a lady wished to see her.

"Who is it?" asked Maria.

Pierce did not know. She was not a visitor of the house. She gave in her name as Mrs. Harding.

The applicant came in. Maria recognized her, when she threw back her veil, as the wife of Harding the undertaker. Pierce closed the door, and they were left together.

"I have taken the liberty of calling,

Mrs. George Godolphin, to ask if you will not pay our account," began the applicant, in a low, confidential tone. "Do, pray, let us have it if you can."

Maria was surprised. There was nothing owing that she was aware of. There could be nothing. "What account are you speaking of?" she asked.

"The account for the interment of the child,—your little one who died last, ma'am."

"But surely that is paid!"

"No, it is not," replied Mrs. Harding. "The other accounts were paid, but that never has been. Mr. George Godolphin has promised it times and again; but he never paid it."

Not paid! The burial of their child! Maria felt her face flush. Was it carelessness on George's part, or had he been so long embarrassed for money that to part with it was a trouble to him. Maria could not help thinking that he might have spared some little remnant for just debts, while lavishing so much upon the bill-discounters. She could not help feeling another thing,—that it was George's place to be meeting and battling with these unhappy claims, rather than hers.

"This must be paid, of course, Mrs. Harding," she said. "I had no idea but that it was paid. When Mr. George Godolphin comes home, I will ask him to see about it instantly."

"Ma'am, can't you pay me now?" urged Mrs. Harding. "If it waits till the bankruptcy's declared, it will have to go into it; and they say—they do say that there'll be nothing for anybody. We can't afford to lose it," she added, speaking confidentially. "What with bad debts and long-standing out-accounts, we are on the eve of a crisis ourselves,—though I should not like it to be known. This will help to stave it off, if you will let us have it."

"I wish I could," returned Maria. "I wish I had it to give you. It ought to have been paid long ago."

"A part of it was money paid out of our pocket," said Mrs. Harding, in a reproachful tone. "Mrs. George

Godolphin, you don't know the boon it would be to us!"

"I would give it you, indeed I would, if I had it," was all Maria could answer.

She could not say more if Mrs. Harding stopped until night. Mrs. Harding became at last convinced of that truth, and took her departure. Maria sat down with burning eyes,—eyes into which the tears would not come.

What with one dropped hint and another, she had grown tolerably conversant with the facts patent to the world. One whisper startled her more than any other. It concerned the bonds of Lord Averil. What was it that was amiss with them? That there was something, and something bad, appeared only too evident. In her terrible state of suspense, of uncertainty, she determined to inquire of Thomas Godolphin.

Writing a few words on a slip of paper, she sent it into the bank-parlor. It was a request that he would see her before he left. Thomas sent back a verbal message, "Very well."

It was growing late in the evening before he came to her. What a day he had had! And he had taken no nourishment, nothing to sustain him. Maria thought of that, and spoke.

"Let me get you something," she said. "Will you take a bit of dinner here, instead of waiting to get to Ashlydyat?"

He shook his head in token of refusal. "It is not much dinner that I shall eat anywhere to-day, Maria. Did you wish to speak to me?"

"I want—to—ask——" she seemed to gasp for breath, and waited a moment for greater calmness. "Thomas," she began again, going close to him, and speaking almost in a whisper, "what is it that is being said about the bonds of Lord Averil?"

Thomas Godolphin did not immediately reply. He may have been deliberating whether it would be well to tell her,—perhaps, whether it *could* be kept from her. Maria seemed to answer the thought.

"I must inevitably know it," she said, striving not to tremble outwardly as well as inwardly. "Better that I hear it from you than from others."

He thought she was right,—that the knowledge must inevitably come to her. "It may be better to tell you, Maria," he said. "George used the bonds for his own purposes."

A dread pause. Maria's throat was working. "Then—it must have been he who took them from the strong-room!"

"It was."

The shivering came on palpably now. "What will be the consequences?" she breathed.

"I do not know. I dread to think. Lord Averil may institute a prosecution."

Their eyes met. Maria controlled her emotion with the desperate energy of despair. "A—criminal—prosecution?"

"It is in his power to do it. He has not been near me to-day, and that looks unfavorable."

"Does he know it yet,—that it was George?"

"He must know it. In fact, I think it likely he may have received official notice of it from town. The report has got spread from thence, and that is how it has become known at Prior's Ash."

Maria moistened her dry lips, and swallowed down the lump in her throat ere she could speak. "Would it be safe for him to return here?"

"If he does return, it must be at the risk of consequences."

"Thomas!—Thomas!" she gasped, the thought occurring to her with a sort of shock, "is he in hiding, do you think?"

"I think it likely that he is. He gave you no address, it seems; neither has he sent one to me."

She drew back to the wall by the mantelpiece, and leaned against it. Every hour seemed to bring forth worse and worse. Thomas gazed with compassion on the haggardness that was seating itself on her sweet face. She was less able to cope with

this misery than he. He laid his hand upon her shoulder, speaking in a low tone :

"It is a fiery trial for both of us, Maria,—one hard to encounter. God alone can help us to bear it. Be very sure that He will help!"

He went out, taking his way on foot to Ashlydyat. There was greater grief there, if possible, than at the bank. The news, touching the bonds, unhappily afloat at Prior's Ash, had penetrated an hour ago to Ashlydyat. Janet and Bessy were in the room when he entered. Janet lifted her severe face.

"Was George mad?" she asked, scarcely above a whisper. "It were better that he had been."

Thomas sat down wearily. He had heard so much of the troubles all day that a little respite from having to speak of them would have been a merciful relief.

"Is it true that George has gone away?" Bessy asked.

"He left for London on Saturday, Maria says," was the reply of Thomas.

"Has Maria been an accomplice in his frauds?" severely resumed Janet.

Thomas turned his eyes gravely upon her. Their expression was sufficient answer. "Can you ask it, Janet? She is more to be pitied than any. It would be kind if one of you would go down to see her; she seems very lonely."

"I cannot," said Janet. "I should be ashamed for people to see my face abroad in Prior's Ash."

"I will go to-morrow," interposed Bessy. "If Prior's Ash looks askance at me, it must. What has happened is no fault of mine," she added, in her customary matter-of-fact manner.

"Will the firm be declared bankrupt?" resumed Janet, after a pause.

"I have been expecting news of it all day," was Thomas Godolphin's answer. "Nothing can avert it."

"Will they bring you in as a participator in George's crime?" she asked, her voice sounding shrill in

her great sorrow. "Will the firm be gone against generally?—or only he?"

"I know nothing," answered Thomas, his hand shading his eyes as he spoke. "I have not seen Lord Averil. It rests with him. One thing I have felt thankful for all day," he added, in a quicker tone. "That Crosse's name was legally withdrawn: otherwise he would have been in the ruin."

Yes, Mr. Crosse was safe. Safe from consequences; and at the present time safe from hearing of the calamity. Though the firm was still familiarly called Godolphin, Crosse, and Godolphin, there was no warranty for it. Mr. Crosse's money and name had been alike withdrawn. He had invested his money in the funds. The small balance lodged in the bank, was a mere nothing, though he did lose it, like the rest of the depositors. He was staying for his health in the south of France.

"I am thankful for one thing,—that my father did not live to see it," returned Janet. "The shock would have killed him."

"Had he lived, it might never have happened," said Thomas. "George would probably have been more cautious in all ways, with him to be responsible to. And my father might have looked more keenly into things; than I have done, and so not have afforded the opportunity for affairs to turn out ill."

Bessy turned to him. "Surely, Thomas, you are not going to blame yourself?"

"No,—only at moments. Justly speaking, blame cannot be charged upon me."

Justly! No, justly it could not. He was feeling it to his heart's core as he recalled the reminiscences of the day, the reproaches lavished on him. He leaned his brow upon his hand like one who feels a pain there.

"Oh," wailed Janet, breaking the silence, "could George not have been contented with ruining us all, without adding to it *this* disgrace? We

could have borne poverty; we must bear the wresting from us of Ashlydyat; but how shall we support the stain on the name of Godolphin? I knew that ruin, and terrible ruin, could not be far off; I knew it by the warnings that I believe came in mercy to prepare us for it; but I did not cast a thought to crime."

"What has Meta been doing at Lady Godolphin's Folly all day?" asked Bessy, breaking another silence.

Thomas did not answer. He knew nothing of it; was not aware she had been there. Bessy happened to cast her eyes to the window.

"Why! here is Lady Sarah Grame!" she exclaimed. "What an hour for her to be paying visits!"

"I cannot see her," said Janet. "I wonder she should intrude here to-day!"

Lady Sarah Grame, as it appeared, had not come with the intention of intruding on Janet. She asked for Mr. Godolphin. Thomas proceeded to the room where she had been shown. She was not sitting, but pacing to and fro in it; and she turned sharply round and met him as he entered, her face flushed with excitement.

"You were once to have been my son-in-law," she said, abruptly.

Thomas, astonished at the address, invited her to a seat, but made no immediate reply. She would not take the chair.

"I cannot sit," she said. "Mr. Godolphin, you were to have been my son-in-law: you would have been so now had Ethel lived. Do you consider Ethel to be any link between us still?"

He was quite at a loss what to answer. He did not understand what she meant. Lady Sarah continued:

"If you do; if you retain any fond remembrance of Ethel, you will prove it now. I had seven hundred pounds in your bank. I have been scraping and saving out of my poor yearly income nearly ever since Ethel went; and I had placed it there. Can you deny it?"

"Dear Lady Sarah, what is the

matter?" he asked; for her excitement was something frightful. "I know you had it there. Why should I deny it?"

"Oh, that's right. People have been saying the bank was going to repudiate all claims. I want you to give it me. Now: privately."

"It is impossible for me to do so, Lady Sarah——"

"I cannot lose it: I have been saving it up for my poor child," she interrupted, in a most excited tone. "She will not have much when I am dead. Would you be so cruel as to rob the widow and the orphan?"

"Not willingly. Never willingly," he answered, in his pain. "I had thought, Lady Sarah, that though all the world misjudged me, you would not."

"Could you not, you who were to have married Ethel, have given me a private hint of it when you found the bank was going wrong? Others may afford to lose their money, but I cannot."

"I did not know it was going wrong," he said. "The blow has fallen upon me as unexpectedly as it has upon others."

Lady Sarah Grame, giving vent to one of the fits of passionate excitement to which she had all her life been subject, suddenly flung herself upon her knees before Thomas Godolphin. She implored him to return the money, to avert "ruin" from Sarah Anne; she reproached him with selfishness, with dishonesty, all in a breath. Can you imagine what it was for Thomas Godolphin to meet this? Upright, gifted with lively conscientiousness, tenderly considerate in rendering strict justice to others, as he had been all his life, these unmerited reproaches were as the iron entering into his soul.

Which was the most to be pitied, himself or Maria? Thomas had called the calamity by its right name,—a fiery trial. It was indeed such: to him and to her. You, who read, cannot picture it. How he got rid of Lady Sarah, he could scarcely tell:

he believed it was by her passion spending itself out. She was completely beside herself that night, almost as one who verges on insanity, and Thomas found a moment to ask himself whether that ill-controlled woman could be the mother of gentle Ethel. Her loud voice and its reproaches penetrated to the household,—an additional drop of bitterness in the cup of the master of Ashlydyat.

But we must go back to Maria, for it is with her this evening that we have most to do. Between seven and eight o'clock, Miss Meta arrived, attended by Charlotte Pain. Meta was in the highest of glee. She was laden with toys and sweatmeats; she carried a doll as big as herself, she had been out in the carriage, she had had a ride on Mrs. Pain's brown horse, held on by that lady; she had swung "above the tops of the trees;" and, more than all, a message had come from the keeper of the dogs in the pit-hole, to say that they were never, never coming out again.

Charlotte had been generously kind to the child; that was evident; and Maria thanked her with her eyes and heart. As to paying much of thanks in words, that was nearly beyond Maria to-night.

"Where's Margery?" asked Meta, in a hurry to show off her treasures.

Margery had not returned. And there was no other train now from the direction she had gone. It was supposed that she had missed it, and would be home in the morning. Meta drew a long face: she wanted Margery to admire the doll.

"You can go and show it to Harriet, dear," said Maria. "She is in the nursery." And Meta flew away, dragging the doll and as many other incumbrances as she could carry.

"Have you heard from George?" asked Charlotte.

"It is Monday," replied Maria, in answer.

"You might have heard by the day mail. You will be sure to hear soon. Don't fret yourself into fiddlestrings.

You are beginning to look downright ill."

Maria made no reply. She would have to look worse yet, for this was only the shadow of the beginning. Charlotte turned and glanced round the room.

"Have those bankruptcy-men been here?"

"No. I have seen nothing of them."

"Well now, there's time yet, and do for goodness' sake let me save some few trifles for you," heartily returned Charlotte. "I am quite sure you must have some treasures that it would be grief to part with. I have been thinking all day long how foolishly scrupulous you are."

Maria was silent for a minute. "They look into every thing, you say?" she asked.

"Look into every thing!" echoed Charlotte. "I should think they do! That would be little. They take every thing."

Maria left the room and came back with a parcel in her hand. It was a very small trunk,—doll's trunks they are sometimes called,—covered with red morocco leather, with a miniature lock and key.

"I would save this," she said, in a whisper, "if you would be so kind as to take care of it for me. I should not like them to look into it. It cannot be any fraud," she added, in a sort of apology for what she was doing. "The things inside would not sell for sixpence, so I do not think even Mr. Godolphin would be angry with me."

Charlotte nodded, took up her dress, and contrived to thrust the trunk into a huge pocket underneath her crinoline. "I put it on on purpose," she said, alluding to the pocket. "I thought you might think better of it by this evening. But this is nothing, Mrs. George Godolphin. You had better give me something else. They'll be in to-morrow morning for certain."

Maria replied that she had nothing else to give, and Charlotte rose, saying she should come or send for Meta again on the morrow. As she went

out, and proceeded up Crosse Street on her way home, she tossed her head with a laugh.

"I thought she'd come to! As if she'd not like to save her jewels as other people do! She's only rather more sly over it,—saying what she had given me would not fetch sixpence! You may tell that to the geese, Mrs. George Godolphin! I should like to see what's inside. I think I will."

And Charlotte put her wish into action. Upon reaching Lady Godolphin's Folly, she flung off her bonnet and mantle, gathered together all the small keys in the house, and had little difficulty in opening the simple lock. The contents were exposed to view. A lock of hair of each of her children who had died, wrapped in separate pieces of paper, with the age of the child and the date of its death written respectively outside. A golden lock of Meta's; a fair curl of George's; half a dozen of his letters to her, written in the short space of time that intervened between their engagement and their marriage, and a sort of memorandum of their engagement. "I was this day engaged to George Godolphin. I pray God to render me worthy of him! to be to him a loving and dutiful wife."

Charlotte's eyes opened to their utmost width, but there was nothing else to see; nothing save the printed paper with which the trunk was lined. "Is she a fool, that Maria Godolphin!" ejaculated Charlotte. Certainly that were not the class of things that Mrs. Pain would have saved from a bankruptcy. And she solaced her feelings by reading Mr. George's letters.

No, Maria was not a fool. Better that she had come under that denomination just now, for she would have felt her position less keenly. Charlotte, perhaps, might have found it difficult to believe, had she been told, that Maria Godolphin was one of those who are sensitively intellectual, to a degree that Mistress Charlotte herself could form little notion of.

It is upon these highly endowed natures that sorrow tells. And the

sorrow must be borne in silence. In the midst of her great misery, so great as to be almost irrepressible, Maria contrived to maintain a calm exterior to the world, even to Charlotte and her outspoken sympathy. The first tears that had been wrung from her she shed that night over Meta. When the child came to her for her good-night kiss, and to say her prayers, Maria was utterly unbinged. She clasped the little thing to her heart and burst into a storm of sobs. Meta was frightened.

Mamma! mamma! What was the matter with mamma?

Maria was unable to answer. The sobs were choking her. Was the child's inheritance going to be that of shame? Maria had grieved bitterly when her other children died: she was almost feeling that it might have been a mercy had this dear one also been taken. She covered the little face with kisses as she held it against her beating heart. Presently she grew calm enough to speak.

"Mamma's not well this evening, darling."

Once more, as on the previous nights, Maria had to drag herself up to her weary bed. As she fell upon her knees by the bedside, she seemed to pray almost against faith and hope. "Father! all things are possible to Thee. Be with me in Thy mercy this night, and help me to pass through it!"

She saw not how she should pass through it. Oh, when will the night be gone! broke incessantly from her bruised heart. Bitterly cold, as before, was she; a sensation of chilly trembling was in every limb; but her head and brain seemed burning, her lips were dry, and that painful nervous affection, the result of excessive anguish, was attacking her throat. Maria had never yet experienced that, and thought she was about to be visited by some strange malady. It was a dreadful night of pain, of apprehension, of cold; inwardly and outwardly she trembled as she lay through it. One terrible word kept beating its

sound on the room's air,—*transportation*. Was her husband in danger of it? Just before daylight she dropped asleep, and for half an hour slept heavily; but with the full dawn of day she was awake again. Not for the first minute was she conscious of reality; but, the next, the full tide of recollection had burst upon her. With a low cry of despair, she leaped from her bed, and began pacing the carpet, all but unable to support the surging waves of mental anguish which rose up one by one and threatened to overmaster her reason. Insanity, had it come on, might have been then more of a relief than a calamity to Maria Godolphin.

"How shall I live through the day? how shall I live through the day?" were the words that broke from her lips. And she fell down by the bedside, and lifted her hands and her heart on high, and wailed out a cry to God to help her to get through it. Of her own strength, she truly believed that she could not.

She would certainly have need of some help, if she were to bear it patiently. At seven o'clock a peal of muffled bells burst over the town, deafening her ears. Some mauvais sujets, discontented sufferers, had gone to the belfry of St. Mark's Church, and set them ringing for the calamity which had overtaken Prior's Ash, in the stoppage of the house of Godolphin.

CHAPTER L.

"SHE'S AS FINE AS A QUEEN!"

"Is Mrs. George Godolphin within?"

The inquiry came from Grace Akeman. She put it in a sharp, angry tone, something like the sharp and angry peal she had just rung on the hall-bell. Pierce answered in the affirmative, and showed her in.

The house seemed gloomy and still, as one in a state of bankruptcy does

seem. Mrs. Akeman thought so as she crossed the hall. The days had gone on to the Thursday, the bankruptcy had been declared, and those pleasant visitors, foretold by Charlotte Pain, had entered on their duties at the bank and at Ashlydyat. Fearfully ill looked Maria: dark circles had formed under her eyes, her face had lost its bloom, and an expression as of some ever-present dread had seated itself upon her features. When Pierce opened the door to usher in her sister, she started palpably.

Things, with regard to George Godolphin, remained as they were. He had not made his appearance at Prior's Ash, and Thomas did not know where to write to him. *Maria did*. She had heard from him on the Tuesday morning. His letter was written apparently in the gayest of spirits. The contrast that was presented between his state of mind (if the tone of the letter might be trusted) and Maria's, was something marvellous,—a curiosity in metaphysics, as pertaining to the spiritual organization of humanity. He sent gay messages to Meta, he sent teasing ones to Margery, he never so much as hinted to Maria that he had a knowledge of any thing being wrong. He should soon be home, he said; but meanwhile Maria was to write him word all news, and address the letter under cover to Mr. Verrall. But she was not to give that address to any one. George Godolphin knew he could rely upon the good faith of his wife. He wrote also to his brother,—a letter which Thomas burnt as soon as read. Probably it was intended for his eye alone. But he expressed no wish to hear from Thomas; neither did he say how a letter might reach him. He may have felt himself in the light of a guilty schoolboy, who knows he merits a lecture, and would escape from it as long as may be. Maria's suspense was nearly unbearable,—and Lord Averil had given no sign of what his intentions might be.

Seeing it was her sister who entered, she turned to her with a sort of relief.

"Oh, Grace!" she said, "I thought I was never going to see any of you again."

Grace would not meet the offered hand. Never much given to ceremony, she often came in and went out without giving hers. But this time Grace had come in anger. She blamed Maria for what had occurred, almost as much as she blamed George. Not of the highly refined order of intellect which characterized Maria, Grace possessed far keener penetration. Had her husband been going wrong, Grace would inevitably have discovered it; and she could not believe but that Maria must have suspected George Godolphin. In her angry feeling against George, whom she had never liked, Grace would have deemed it right that Maria should denounce him. Whether she had been willfully blind, or really blind, Grace alike despised her for it. "I shall not spare her when I see her," Grace had said to her husband; and she did not mean to spare her, now she had come.

"I have intruded here to ask if you will go to the rectory and see mamma," Grace began. "She is not well, and cannot come to you."

Grace's manner was strangely cold and stern. And Maria did not like the word "intruded." "I am glad to see you," she replied in a gentle voice. "It is very dull here now. Nobody has been near me, except Bessy Godolphin."

"You cannot expect many visitors," said Grace, in her hard manner,—very hard to-day.

"I do not think I could see them if they came," was Maria's answer. "I was not speaking of visitors. Is mamma ill?"

"Yes she is; and little wonder," replied Grace. "I almost wish I was not married, now this misfortune has fallen upon us: it would at any rate be another pair of hands in the rectory, and I am more capable of work than is mamma or Rose. But I am married, and of course my place must be my husband's home."

"What do you mean by another pair of hands, Grace?"

"There are going to be changes at the rectory," returned Grace, staring at the wall behind Maria, apparently to avoid looking at her. "One servant only is to be retained, and the two little Chisholm girls are coming there to be kept and educated. Mamma will have all the care upon her; she and Rose must both work and teach. Papa will keep the little boy at school, and have him home in the holidays, to make more trouble at the rectory. They, papa and mamma, will have to pinch and screw; they must deprive themselves of every comfort; bare necessaries alone must be theirs; and all that can be saved from their income will be put by towards repaying the trust-money."

"Is this decided?" asked Maria, in a low tone.

"It is decided, so far as papa can decide any thing," sharply rejoined Grace. "If the law is put in force against him by his co-trustee, for the recovery of the money, he does not know what he would do. Possibly the living would have to be sequestered."

Maria did not speak. What Grace was saying was all too true and terrible. Grace flung up her hand with a passionate movement.

"Had I been the one to bring this upon my father and mother, Maria, I should wish I had been out of the world before it had been done."

"I did not bring it upon them, Grace," was Maria's scarcely-breathed answer.

"Yes, you did. Maria, I have come here to speak my mind, and I must speak it. How could you, for shame, let papa pay in that money, the nine thousand pounds? If you and George Godolphin must have flaunted your state and your expense in the eyes of the world, and ruined people to do it, you might have spared your father and mother."

"Grace, why do you blame me?"

Mrs. Akeman rose from her chair

and began pacing the room. She did not speak in a loud tone,—not so much in an angry one as in a clear, sharp, decisive one: very much like the tone used by the rector of All Souls' when in his cynical moods.

"He has been a respected man all his life; he has kept up his position——"

"Of whom do you speak?" interrupted Maria, really not sure whether she was applying the words satirically to George Godolphin.

"Of whom do I speak!" retorted Grace. "Of your father and mine. I say he has been a respected man all his life; has maintained his position as a clergyman and a gentleman; has reared his children suitably; has exercised moderate hospitality at the rectory, and yet was putting something by, that we might have a few pounds each at his death, to help us on in the world. Not one of his children but wants helping on, save the grand wife of Mr. George Godolphin."

"Grace! Grace!"

"And what have you brought him to?" continued Grace, lifting her hand in token that she would have out her say. "To poverty in his old age,—he is getting old, Maria,—to trouble, to care, to privation; perhaps to disgrace as a false trustee. I would have sacrificed my husband, rather than my father."

Maria lifted her aching head. The reproaches were cruel; and yet they told home. It was her husband who had ruined her father, and, it may be said, ruined him deliberately. Grace resumed, answering the last thought almost as if she had divined it.

"If ever a shameless fraud was committed upon another, George Godolphin willfully committed it when he took that nine thousand pounds. Prior's Ash may well be calling him a swindler!"

"Oh, Grace, don't!" she said, imploringly. "He could not have known that it was unsafe to take it."

Whatever his faults, it was Maria's duty to defend him against the world.

"Could not have known?" indignantly returned Grace. "You are either a fool, Maria, or you are deliberately saying what you know to be untrue. You must be aware that he never entered it in the books; that he appropriated it to his own use. He is a heartless, bad man! He might have chosen somebody else to play upon, rather than his wife's father. Were I papa, I should prosecute him."

"Grace, you are killing me," wailed Maria. "Don't you think I have enough to bear?"

"I make no doubt you have. I should be sorry to have to bear the half. But you have brought it upon yourself, Maria. What though George Godolphin was your husband, you need not have upheld him in his course. Look at the ruin that has fallen upon Prior's Ash! I can tell you that your name and George Godolphin's will be remembered for many a long day. But it won't be with a blessing!"

"Grace," she said, lifting her streaming eyes, for tears had at length come to her relief, "have you no pity for me?"

"What pity have you had for others?" was Grace Akeman's retort. "How many must go down to their graves steeped in poverty, who, but for George Godolphin's treachery, would have passed the rest of their lives in comfort! You have been a blind simpleton, and nothing else. George Godolphin has lavished his money and his attentions broadcast elsewhere, and you have looked complacently on. Do you think Prior's Ash has had its eyes closed, as you have? But it ought to have told what was gathering."

"What do you mean, Grace?"

"Never mind what I mean," was Grace's answer. "I am not going to tell you what you might have seen for yourself. It is all of a-piece. If people will marry gay and attractive men they must pay for it."

Maria remained silent. Grace also for a time. Then she ceased her

walking, and sat down opposite her sister.

"I came to ask you whether it is not your intention to go down and see mamma. She is in bed,—suffering from a violent cold, she says. I know,—suffering from anguish of mind. If you would not add ingratitude to what has passed, you will pay her a visit to-day. She wishes to see you."

"I will go," said Maria. But as she spoke the words the knowledge that it would be a fearful trial—the showing herself in the streets of the town—was very present to her. "I will go to-day, Grace."

"Very well," said Grace, rising; "that's all I came for."

"Not quite all, Grace. You came, I think, to make me more unhappy than I was."

"I cannot gloss over facts; it is not in my nature," was the reply of Grace. "If black is black, I must call it black; and white, white. I have not said all I could say, Maria. I have not spoken of our loss; a very paltry one, but a good deal to us. I have not alluded to other and worse rumors, touching your husband. I have spoken of the ruin brought on our father and mother, and I hold you nearly as responsible for it as George Godolphin. Where's Meta?" she added, after a short pause.

"At Lady Godolphin's Folly. Mrs. Pain has been very kind——"

Grace turned sharply round. "And you can let her go *there!*"

"Mrs. Pain has been kind, I say, in coming for her. This is but a dull house now for Meta. Margery went out on Monday, and has been detained by her sister's illness."

"Let Meta come to me if you want to get her out," returned Grace, in a tone more stern than any that had gone before it. "If you knew the free comments indulged in by the public, you would not let a child of yours be at Lord Godolphin's Folly, while Charlotte Pain inhabits it."

Somehow, Maria had not the courage to inquire more particularly as to

the "comments:" it was a subject that she shrank from, though vague and uncertain at the best. Mrs. Ake-man went out, and Maria, the strings of her grief loosened, sat down and cried as if her heart would break.

With quite a sick feeling of dread she dressed herself to go to the rectory. But not until later in the day. She put it off, and put it off, with some faint wish, foolish and vain, that dusk would forestall its usual hour of approach. The western sun, drawing towards its setting, streamed full on the street of Prior's Ash as she walked down it,—walked down it, almost like a criminal, her black veil over her face, flushed with its sensitive dread. Nobody but herself knew how she shrank from the eyes of her fellow-creatures.

She might have ordered the close carriage and gone down in it,—for the carriages and horses were yet at her disposal for use. But that, to Maria, would have been worse. To go out in state in her carriage, attended by her men-servants, would have seemed more brazenly defiant of public feelings than to appear on foot. Were these feelings ultra-sensitive? absurd? Not altogether.

"Look at her, walking there! She's as fine as a queen!" The words, in an insolent, sneering tone, caught her ear as she passed a group—a low group—gathered at the corner of a street. They would not be likely to come from any other. That they were directed to her there was no doubt; and Maria's ears tingled as she hastened on.

Was she so fine? she could not help asking herself. She had put on the plainest things she had,—a black silk dress and a black mantle, a white silk bonnet and the black veil. All good things, certainly, but plain, and not new. She began to feel that reproaches were cast to her which she did *not* deserve: but they were not the less telling upon her heart.

Did she dread going into the rectory? Did she dread the reproaches she might be met with there?—the coldness? the slights? If so, she did not

find them. She was met by the most considerate kindness, and perhaps it wrung her heart all the more.

They had seen her coming, and Rose ran forward to meet her in the hall, and kissed her; Reginald came boisterously out with a welcome, a chart in one hand, parallel-rulers and a pair of compasses in the other: he was making a pretence of pricking off a ship's place in the chart. The rector and Isaac were not at home.

"Is mamma in bed?" she asked of Rose.

"Yes; but her cold is better this evening. She will be so glad to see you."

Maria went up the stairs and entered the room alone. The anxious look of care, of trouble, on Mrs. Hastings's face, its feverish hue, struck her forcibly, as she advanced timidly, uncertain of her reception. Uncertain of the reception of a mother? With an eagerly fond look, a rapid gesture of love, Mrs. Hastings drew Maria's face down to her for an embrace.

It unhinged Maria. She fell on her knees at the side of the bed, and gave vent to a passionate flood of tears. "Oh mother, mother, I could not help it!" she wailed. "It has been no fault of mine."

Mrs. Hastings did not speak. She laid her arm round Maria's neck, and let it rest there. But the sobs redoubled.

"Don't, child!" she said then. "You will make yourself ill. My poor child!"

"I am ill, mamma. I think I shall never be well again," sobbed Maria, forgetting some of her reticence. "I feel sometimes that it would be a relief to die."

"Hush, my love. Keep despair from you, whatever you do."

"I could bear it better but for the thought of you and papa. That is killing me. Indeed, indeed I have not deserved the blame thrown upon me. I knew nothing of what was happening."

"My dear, we have not blamed you."

"Oh, yes, everybody blames me!" wailed Maria. "And I know how sad it is for you all to suffer by us. It breaks my heart to think of it. Mamma, do you know I dreamt last night that a great shower of gold was falling down to me faster than I could catch it in my two hands. Such heaps of sovereigns! I thought I was going to pay everybody, and I ran away laughing,—oh, so glad! and held out some to papa. 'Take them,' I said to him, 'they are slipping through my fingers.' I fell down when I was close to him, and awoke. I awoke—and—then"—she could scarcely speak for sobs—"I remembered. Mamma, but for Meta, I *should* have been glad in that moment to die."

The emotion of both was very great, nearly overpowering Maria. Mrs. Hastings could not say much of comfort, she was too prostrated herself. Anxious as she had been to see Maria,—for she could not bear the thought of her being left alone and unnoticed in her distress,—she almost repented having sent for her. Neither was strong enough to bear this excess of agitation.

Not a word was spoken of George Godolphin. Mrs. Hastings did not mention him; Maria could not. The rest of the interview was mostly spent in silence, Maria holding her mother's hand, and giving way to a rising sob now and then. Into the affairs of the bank Mrs. Hastings felt that she could not enter. There must be a wall of silence between them on that point, as on the subject of George.

At the foot of the stairs, as she went down, she met her father. "Oh, is it you, Maria!" he said. "How are you?"

His tone was a kind one. But Maria's heart was full, and she could not answer. He turned into the room by which they were standing, and she went in after him.

"When is your husband coming back? I suppose you don't know?"

"No," she answered, obliged to confess to it.

"My opinion is, it would be better

for him to face it than to remain away," said the rector. "A more honorable course, at any rate."

Still there was no reply. And Mr. Hastings looking at his daughter's face in the twilight of the evening, saw that it was working with emotion,—that she was striving, almost in vain, to repress her feelings.

"It must be very dull for you at the bank now, Maria," he resumed, in a more gentle tone than he was in the habit of using to anybody: "dull and unpleasant. Will you come to the rectory for a week or two, and bring Meta?"

The tears streamed from her eyes then, unrepressed. "Thank you, papa! thank you for all your kindness," she answered, striving not to choke. "But I must stay at home as long as I may."

She turned again to the hall, murmuring something to the effect that it was late, and she must be departing. "Who is going to walk with you?" asked the rector.

"I will," cried out Reginald, who heard the question, and came forth from another room.

They departed together. Reginald talking gayly, as if there were not such a thing as care in the world,—Maria unable to answer him. The pain in her throat was worse than usual then. In turning out at the rectory-gate, whom should they come upon but old Jekyl, walking slowly along, nearly bent double with rheumatism. Reginald accosted him.

"Why, old Jekyl! it's never you! Are you in the land of the living, yet?"

"Ay, it's me, sir. Old bones don't get laid so easy,—in spite, maybe, of their wishing it. Ma'am," added the old man, turning to Maria, "I'd like to make bold to say a word to you. That sixty pound of mine, what was put in the bank,—you mind it?"

"Yes," said Maria, faintly.

"The losing of it 'll be just dead ruin to me, ma'am. I lost my bees last summer, as you heard on, and that bit o' money was all, like, I had to look to. One must have a crust o'

bread and a sup o' tea, as long as it pleases the Almighty to keep one above ground. One can't lie down and clam. Would you be pleased just to say a word to the gentlemen, that that trifle o' money mayn't be lost to me? Mr. Godolphin will listen to you."

Maria scarcely knew what to answer. She had not the courage to tell him the money was lost; she did not like to raise unjustifiable hopes by saying it might be saved.

Old Jekyl interpreted the hesitation wrongly. "It was you yourself, ma'am, as advised my putting it there; for myself, I shouldn't have had a thought on't: surely you won't object to say a word for me, that I mayn't lose it now. My two sons, David and Jonathan, come home one day when they had been a-working at your house, and telled me, both of 'em, that you recommended me to take my money to the bank,—that it would be safe and sure. I can't afford to lose it," he added, in a pitiful tone; "it's all my subsistence on this side o' the grave."

"Of course she'll speak to them, Jekyl," interposed Reginald, answering for Maria just as freely and lightly as he would have answered for himself. "I'll speak to Mr. George Godolphin myself when he comes home; I don't mind; I can say any thing to him. It would be too bad for you to lose it. Good-evening. Don't go pitch-falling over! You have not got your sea-legs on to-night."

The feeble old man continued his way, a profusion of hearty thanks breaking from him. They fell on Maria's heart like a knell. Old Jekyl's money had as surely gone as had the rest! And but for her, it might never have been placed in the bank of the Godolphins.

She turned to drag herself home again, there to pass her usual night of pain,—to wail out, on retiring to her chamber, "Oh, when will the night be gone?" To rise in the morning to the anguished cry, "How shall I live through the day?"

CHAPTER LI.

MARGERY'S TONGUE LET LOOSE.

THE streets were lighted in Prior's Ash, and people passed to and fro in them on their evening occupations. Two there were walking together—a lady, and a young man dressed in a sailor's jacket—who seemed by their pace to be in a hurry. The lady appeared to wish to shun observation, for she bent her face underneath her veil, and kept, so far as might be, in the shade. You need not be told that they were Maria Godolphin and Reginald Hastings. *He* swung along, nodding to everybody he knew. Recent events reflected no shame on him; and if they had reflected it, Reginald Hastings was not one to take the shame to himself.

"What's the matter?" cried he freely to a group, through whom they had to push their way along the pavement. "Anybody down in a fit?"

"Old Byles is a-shutting up of his shop for good," came the answer. "Mr. George Godolphin have had his money, so he says it's of no use for him to try to keep open; he may as well go right off into the workus."

Pleasant hearing for Maria! This Byles kept a general shop, and they did owe him something considerable, for the servants were in the habit of running there when stores ran short at home. The man's savings, also, had been in the bank. He was accustomed to get tipsy every night; and, when in that state, would hold forth at his door upon the subject of his grievances to the listeners who collected round it. It was long since he had had such a grievance as this.

"Bah!" cried Reginald. "He'll be all right in the morning."

"Come along, Reginald," whispered Maria, in fear lest the crowd should recognize, perhaps insult her. And they walked on: her head bent lower; Reginald's turned back with a laugh.

When they arrived at the bank, Reginald gave a flourish on the knocker enough to knock it flat, pulled

the bell with a peal that alarmed the servants, and then made off with a hasty good-night, leaving Maria standing there alone, in his careless fashion. Possibly he was anticipating some fun with old Byles. At the same moment there advanced from the opposite direction, a woman carrying a brown-paper parcel.

It was Margery. Detained at the place where she had gone to meet her sister by that sister's sudden illness, she had been unable to return until now. It had put Margery out considerably, and altogether she had come home in any thing but a genial humor.

"I knowed there'd be nothing lucky in the journey," she grumbly cried, in reply to Maria's salutation of welcome. "The night afore I started I was stuck in the midst of a muddy pool all night in my dream, and couldn't get out of it."

"Is your sister better?" asked Maria.

"She's better; and gone on into Wales. But she's the poorest creature I ever saw. Is all well at home, ma'am?"

"All well," replied Maria, the tone of her voice a subdued one, as she thought how different it was in one sense from "well."

"And how has Harriet managed with the child?" continued Margery, in a tart tone, meant for the unconscious Harriet.

"Very well indeed," answered Maria. "Quite well."

The door had been opened, and they were then crossing the hall. Maria turned into the dining-room, and Margery continued her way upstairs, grunting as she did so. To believe that Harriet, or anybody else, herself excepted, could do "quite well" by Meta, was a stretch of credulity utterly inadmissible to Margery's biased mind. In the nursery sat Harriet, a damsel in a smart cap with flying pink ribbons.

"What, is it you!" was her salutation to Margery. "We thought you had taken up your abode yonder for good."

"Did you?" said Margery. "What else did you think?"

"And your sister, poor dear!" continued Harriet, passing by the retort and speaking in a sympathizing tone, for she generally found it to her interest to keep friends with Margery. "Is she got well?"

"As well as she ever will get, I suppose," was Margery's crusty answer.

She sat down, untied her bonnet-strings and threw it off, and unpinned her shawl. Harriet snuffed the candle and resumed her work, which appeared to be the sewing of tapes on a pinafore of Meta's.

"Has she tore 'em off again?" asked Margery, her eyes following the progress of the needle.

"She's always tearing them off," responded Harriet, biting the end of her thread.

"And how's things going on here?" demanded Margery, her voice assuming a confidential tone, as she drew her chair nearer to Harriet's. "The bank's not opened again, I find, for I asked so much at the station."

"Things couldn't be worse," said Harriet. "It's all a smash together. The house is bankrupt."

"Lord help us!" ejaculated Margery.

Harriet let her work fall on the table, and leaned her head towards Margery's, her voice dropping to a whisper.

"I say! We have got a man in here!"

"In here!" breathlessly rejoined Margery.

Harriet nodded. "Since last Tuesday. There's one stopping here, and there's another at Ashlydyat. Margery, I declare to you when they were going through the house, them creatures, I felt that sick that I could have heaved my inside right out. If I had dared, I'd have upset a bucket of boiling water over the lot as they came up the stairs."

Margery sat, revolving the news, a terribly blank look upon her face. Harriet resumed:

"We shall all have to leave, every soul of us: and soon, too, we expect. I don't know about you, you know. I am so sorry for my mistress!"

"Well!" burst forth Margery, giving vent to her indignation, "he has brought matters to a fine pass!"

"Meaning master?" asked Harriet.

"Meaning nobody else," was the tart rejoinder.

"He just has," said Harriet. "Prior's Ash is saying such things that it raises one's hair to hear it. We don't like to repeat them again, only just among ourselves."

"What's the drift of 'em?" inquired Margery.

"There's all sorts of drifts,—about his having took and made away with the money in the tills; and those bonds of Lord Averil's, that there was so much looking after,—it was he took them. Who'd have believed it, Margery, of Mr. George Godolphin, with his gay laugh and his handsome face?"

"Better for him if his laugh had been a bit less gay and his face less handsome," was the sharp remark of Margery. "He might have been steadier then."

"Folks talk of the Verralls, and that set, up at Lady Godolphin's Folly," rejoined Harriet, her voice falling still lower. "Prior's Ash says he has had too much to do with them, and——"

"I don't want that scandal repeated over to me," angrily reprimanded Margery. "Perhaps other people know as much about it as Prior's Ash; they have got eyes, I suppose. There's no need for you to bring it up to one's face."

"But they talk chiefly about Mr. Verrall," persisted Harriet, with a stress upon the name. "It's said that he and master have had business-dealings together of some sort, and that that's where the money's gone. I was not going to bring up any thing else. The man down-stairs—and upon my word, Margery, he's a decent man enough, if you can only forget who he is—says that there are thousands

and thousands gone into Verrall's pockets which ought to be in master's."

"They'd ruin a saint, and I have always said it," was Margery's angry remark. "See her tearing about with her horses and her carriages, in her feathers and her brass; and master at her tail, after her! Many's the time I've wondered that Mr. Godolphin has put up with it. I'd have given him a word of a sort, if I had been his brother."

"I should if I had been his wife——" Harriet was beginning, but Margery fiercely arrested her. Her own tongue might be guilty of as many slips as it chose in the forgetful heat of argument; but it was high treason for Harriet's to lapse into one.

"You hold your sauce, will you, girl! How dare you bring your mistress's name up in any such thing? I don't know what you mean, for my part. When she complains of her husband, it'll be time enough then for you to take up the chorus. Could you wish to see a better husband, pray?"

"He's quite a model-husband—to her face," replied saucy Harriet. "And the old saying's a true one,—what the eye don't see the heart won't rue. Where's the need for us to quarrel over it," she added, picking up her work again. "You have got your opinion and I have got mine; and if they were laid naked side by side it's likely they'd not be far apart from each other. Let them be bad or good, opposite or favorable, it can't make any change in the past. What's done is done, and the house is broken up."

Margery flung her shawl off her shoulders, something like Charlotte Pain had flung off hers, the previous Monday morning, in the breakfast-room, and a silence ensued.

"Perhaps the house may go on again?" said Margery, presently, in a dreamy tone.

"Why, how can it?" returned Harriet, looking up from her work at the pinafore, which she had resumed.

"All the money's gone. A bank can't go on without money."

"What does he say to it?" very sharply asked Margery.

"What does who say to it?"

"Master. Does he say how the money comes to gone? How does he like facing the creditors?"

"He is not here," said Harriet. "He has not been home since he left last Saturday. It's said he is in London."

"And Mr. Godolphin?"

"Mr. Godolphin's here. And a nice task of it has he every day, with the angry creditors. If we have had one of the bank-creditors bothering at the hall-door for Mr. George, we have had fifty. At first, they'd not believe he was away, and wouldn't be got rid of. Creditors of the house, too, have come, worrying my mistress out of her life."

"Why need they worry her?" wrathfully asked Margery.

"They must see somebody; and Mr. George is not here to be seen."

"Then he ought to be," snapped Margery.

"So he ought. There's a sight of money owing in the town. Cook says she'd not have believed there was a quarter of the amount, only just for household things, till it came to be summed up. Some of them downstairs are wondering if they will get their wages. And—I say, Margery, have you heard about Mr. Hastings?"

"What about him?" asked Margery.

"He has lost every shilling he had. It was in the bank, and——"

"He couldn't have had so very much to lose," interposed Margery, who was in the humor to contradict every thing. "What can a parson save?—not much."

"But it is not that—his money. The week before the bank went, he had lodged between nine and ten thousand pounds in it for safety. He was left trustee, you know, to Mr. Chisholm's children, and their money was paid to him, it turns out, and he brought it to the bank. It's all gone."

Margery lifted her hands in dismay. "I have heard say that failures is like nothing but a devouring fire, for the money they swallow up," she remarked. "It seems it's true."

"My mistress has looked so ill ever since! And she can eat nothing. Pierce says it would melt the heart of a stone to see her make believe to eat before him and them, waiting at dinner, trying to get a morsel down her throat, and can't. My belief is, that she's thinking of her father's ruin night and day. Report is, that master took the money from the rector, knowing it would never be paid back again."

"It ought to have been paid when the bank went," said Margery.

"But master has used it, they say. That man down-stairs seems to know every thing. We wonder where he gathers all his news from."

Margery got up with a jerk. "If I stop here I shall be hearing worse and worse," she remarked. "This will be enough to kill Miss Janet. That awful Shadow hasn't been on the Dark Plain this year for nothing. We might well notice that it never was so black!"

Perching her bonnet on her head hind part before, to save the trouble of carrying it, and throwing her shawl over her arm, Margery lighted a candle and opened a door leading from the room into a bedchamber. Her own bed stood opposite to her, and in a corner at the opposite end was the little bed of Miss Meta. She laid her shawl and bonnet on the drawers, and advanced on tiptoe, shading the light with her hand.

Intending to take a foad look at her darling. But, like many more of us who advance confidently on some pleasure, Margery arrived at nothing but disappointment. The place where Meta ought to have been was empty. Nothing to be seen but the smooth, white bedclothes, laid ready open for the young lady's reception. Did a fear dart over Margery's mind that she must be lost? She certainly flew

back, as if some such idea occurred to her.

"Where's the child?" she burst out.

"She has not come home yet," replied Harriet, with composure. "I was waiting here for her."

"Come home from where? Where is she?"

"At Lady Godolphin's Folly. But Mrs. Pain has never kept her so late as this before."

"She's there! With Mrs. Pain?" shrieked Margery.

"She has been there every day this week. Mrs. Pain has either come or sent for her. Look there," added Harriet, pointing to a collection of toys in a corner of the nursery. "She has brought home all those things. Mrs. Pain loads her with them."

Margery answered not a word. She blew out the candle, leaving it under Harriet's nose for her benefit, and went down-stairs to the dining-room. Maria, her things never taken off, was sitting just as she had come in, apparently lost in thought. She rose up when Margery entered, and began untying her bonnet.

"Harriet says that the child's at Mrs. Pain's,—that she has been let go there all the week," began Margery, without circumlocution.

"Yes," replied Maria. "I cannot think why she has not come home. Mrs. Pain—"

"And you could let her go there, ma'am?" interrupted Margery's indignant voice, paying little heed or deference to what her mistress might be saying. "There! If anybody had come and told it to me before this night, I'd not have believed it."

"But, Margery, it has done her no harm. There's a pinafore or two torn, I believe, and that's the worst. Mrs. Pain has been exceedingly kind. She has kept her dogs shut up all the week."

Margery's face was working ominously. It bore the signs of a brewing storm.

"Kind! She!" repeated Margery, almost beside herself. "Why, then,

if it's come to this pass, you had better have your eyes opened, ma'am, if nothing else will stop the child's going there. Your child at Mrs. Charlotte Pain's! Prior's Ash will talk more than it has talked."

"What has Prior's Ash said?" asked Maria, an uncomfortable feeling stealing over her.

"It has wondered whether Mrs. George Godolphin has been wholly blind or only partially so; that's what it has done, ma'am," returned Margery, quite forgetting herself in her irritation. "And the woman coming here continually with her bold face! I'd rather see Meta——"

Margery's eloquence was brought to a summary end. A noise in the hall was followed by the boisterous entrance of the ladies in question, Meta and Mrs. Charlotte Pain. Charlotte—really she was wild at times—had brought Meta home on horseback. Late as it was, she had mounted her horse to give the child pleasure, had mounted the child on the saddle before her, and so they had rode down, attended by a groom. Charlotte wore her habit and held her whip in her hand. She came in pretending to beat an imaginary horse, for the delectation of Meta. Meta was furnished with a boy's whip, a whistle at one end and a sweeping cord and lash at the other. She was beating an imaginary horse, too, varying the play with an occasional whistle. What with the noise, the laughing, the lashes, and the whistle, it was as if Bedlam had broken loose. To crown the whole, Meta's brown-holland dress had a woful rent in it, and the brim of her straw hat was nearly torn from the crown. Margery, in her scandalized feelings, rather wished the floor would come asunder and let everybody into the opening—as the trap-doors swallow up the diables and other bad characters at the play. Margery began to think they were all bad together: herself, her mistress, Mrs. Pain, and Meta.

Meta caught sight of Margery and flew to her; but not before Margery had made a sort of grab at the child.

Clasping her in her arms she held her there, as if she would protect her from some infection. To be clasped in arms, however, and thus deprived of the delights of whip-smacking and whistling, did not accord with the ideas of Miss Meta, and she struggled to get free.

"You'd best stop here and hide yourself, poor child!" cried Margery, in a voice uncommonly pointed.

"It's not much," said Charlotte, supposing the remark applied to the damages. "The brim is only unsewn, and the blouse is an old one. She did it with the swing."

"Who's talking of that?" fiercely responded Margery to Mrs. Pain. "If folks had to hide their faces for nothing worse than clothes, it wouldn't be of much account."

Charlotte did not like the tone. "Perhaps you will wait until your opinion's asked for," said she, turning haughtily on Margery. There had been incipient warfare between these two for years; and they both were innately conscious of it.

A shrill whistle from Meta interrupted the contest. She had escaped, and was standing in the middle of the room, her legs astride, her damaged hat set rakishly on the side of her head, her attitude altogether not unlike that of a man standing to see a horse through his paces. It was precisely what the young lady was imitating; she had been taken by Charlotte to the stable-yard that day, to witness the performance.

Clack, clack! "Heave your feet up, you lazy brute!" Clack, clack, clack! "Mamma, I am making a horse canter."

Charlotte looked on with admiring ecstasy, and clapped her hands to show it. Maria seemed somewhat bewildered, and Margery stood with dilating eyes and open mouth. There was little doubt that Miss Meta, under the able tuition of Mrs. Pain, might become an exceedingly fast young lady in time.

"You have been teaching her that!" burst forth Margery to Mrs. Pain in

her uncontrollable anger. "What else might you have been teaching her? It's fit, it is, for you to be let have the companionship of Miss Maria Godolphin!"

Charlotte laughed in her face defiantly—contemptuously—with a gleeful, merry accent. Margery, perhaps distrustful of what she might be further tempted to say, herself, put an end to the scene, by catching up Meta and forcibly carrying her off, in spite of rebellious kicks and screams. In her temper, she flung the whip to the other end of the hall as she passed through it. "They'd make you into a boy, and worse, if they had their way! I wish Miss Janet had been here to-night!"

"What an idiotic old maid she is, that Margery!" exclaimed Charlotte, laughing still. "When did she get home?"

"To-night, not a quarter of an hour ago," replied Maria. "Will you not sit down, Mrs. Pain?"

"I can't; my horse is waiting," replied Charlotte. "I suppose there's nothing fresh to-day?"

"Not that I have heard of. But I think they perhaps keep news from me."

"Well, don't get down-hearted. Worse affairs than these have been bottled out, and nobody been much the worse. Good-night. I shall come or send for Meta to-morrow."

"Not to-morrow," dissented Maria, feeling that the struggle with Margery would be too formidable. "I thank you very much for your kindness, Mrs. Pain," she heartily added: "but now that Margery has returned she will not like to part with Meta."

"As you will," said Charlotte, with a laugh. "Margery would not let her come, you think. Good-night. Dormez bien."

Before the sound of the closing of the hall-door had ceased its echoes through the house, Margery was in the dining-room again, her face white with anger. Her mistress, a thing she very rarely did, ventured on a reproof.

"You forgot yourself, Margery, when you spoke just now to Mrs. Pain. I felt inclined to apologize to her for you."

This was the climax. "Forgot myself!" echoed Margery, her white face growing whiter. "No, ma'am, it's because I did not forget myself that she's gone out of the house without her ears tingling. I should have made 'em tingle if I had spoke out. Not that some folk's ears can tingle," added Margery, amending her proposition. "Hers is of the number, so I should have spent my words for nothing. If Mr. George had spent his words upon somebody else, it might be the better for us all now."

"Margery!"

"I can't help it, ma'am, I must have my say. Heaven knows I'd not have opened my mouth to you; I'd have kept it closed forever, though I burst over it,—and it's not five minutes ago that I pretty well snapped Harriet's nose off for daring to give out hints and to bring up your name,—but it's time you did know a little of what has been going on, to the scandal of Prior's Ash. Meta up at Lady Godolphin's Folly with that woman!"

"Margery!" again interrupted her mistress. But Margery's words were as a torrent that bears down all before it.

"It has been the talk of the town, it has been the talk of the servants here, it has been the talk among the servants of Ashlydyat. If I thought you'd let the child go out with her in public again, I'd pray that I might first follow her in her coffin."

Maria's face had turned as white as Margery's. She sat something like a statue, gazing at the woman with eyes in which there shone a strange kind of fear.

"I—don't—know—what—it—is—you—mean," she gasped, the words coming out in gasps.

"It means, ma'am, that you have lived with a curtain before your eyes. You have thought my master a saint and a paragon, and he was neither the one nor the other. And now I hope

you'll pardon me for saying to your face what others have been long saying behind your back."

Maria made no reply. She passed her handkerchief over her brow, where the drops had gathered.

"Master has been upon the wrong tack this long while," went on Margery, her manner growing somewhat more composed, her tone more in accordance with reason. "There was her, and there was Verrall, and there was—but it's no good going over it," she broke off. "If we had only had our wits about us, we might have told what it would end in."

She turned sharply off as she concluded, and quitted the room abruptly as she had entered it,—leaving Maria motionless, her breath coming in gasps, and the dew-drops cold on her brow.

The substance of what Margery had spoken out so broadly had sometimes passed through her mind as a dim shadow. But never to rest there.

CHAPTER LII.

ANOTHER NAIL IN THE COFFIN OF THOMAS GODOLPHIN.

THERE went on the progress of a few days, and another week was in. Every hour brought to light more—what are we to call it—imprudence?—of Mr. George Godolphin's. His friends termed it imprudence: his enemies villany. Thomas called it nothing: he never cast reproach to George by a single word; he would have taken the whole odium upon himself, had it been possible to take it. George's conduct was breaking his heart, was driving him to his grave somewhat before his time; but Thomas never said in the hearing of others,—he has been a bad brother to me.

George Godolphin was not yet home. It could not be said that he was in concealment, as he was sometimes met

in London by people visiting it. Perhaps he carried his habitual carelessness so far as the perilling of his own safety; and his absence from Prior's Ash may have been the result only of his distaste to meet that ill-used community. Had he been the sole partner, he must have been there, to answer to his bankruptcy; as it was, Thomas, hitherto, had answered all in his own person.

But there came a day when Thomas could not answer it. Ill or well, he rose now to the early breakfast-table; he had to hasten to the bank betimes, for there was much work there with the accounts; and one morning when they were at breakfast, Bexley, his own servant, entered with one or two post letters.

But, before the old man could reach his master, whose back was to the door, Janet made him a sign, and Bexley laid the letters silently down on a remote table. Thomas Godolphin's letters had not latterly been of a soothing or composing nature, whether addressed to the bank or to Ashlydyat; and Janet deemed it just as well that he should at least sit to his breakfast in peace.

The circumstance of the letters being there passed from Janet's mind. Thomas was silent, but she, Bessy, and Cecil were discussing certain news which they had received the previous day from Lady Godolphin,—news which had surprised them. My lady was showing herself to be a true friend. She had announced to them that it was her intention to resume her residence at the Folly, that they "might not be separated from Prior's Ash, the place of their birth and home." Of course it was an intimation, really delicately put, that their future home must be with her. "Never for me," Janet remarked: *her* future residence would not be at Prior's Ash; as far removed from it as might be. Bessy thought she should rather like it: it would grieve her to quit Prior's Ash. Cecil said nothing.

Busy talking, they did not particularly notice that Thomas had risen

from his chair, and was seated at the distant table, opening his letters; until a faint sound, something like a moan, startled them. He was leaning back in his chair, seemingly unconscious; his hands had fallen, his face was the hue of the grave. Surely those dews upon it were not the dews of death?

Cecil screamed; Bessy flung open the door and called out for help; Janet only turned to them, her hands lifted, to enjoin silence, a warning word upon her lips. Bexley came running in, and looked at his master.

"He'll be better presently," he whispered.

"Yes, he will be better presently," assented Janet. "But I should like Snow to be here."

Bexley was the only man-servant left at Ashlydyat. Short work is generally made of the dispersion of a household when the means come to a summary end, as they had with the Godolphins: and there had been no difficulty in finding places for the valuable servants of Ashlydyat. Bexley had stoutly refused to go. He didn't want wages, he said, but he was not going to leave his master, so long as—— Bexley did not say so long as what, but they had understood him. So long as his master was in life.

Thomas began to revive. He slowly opened his eyes, and raised his hand to wipe the moisture from his white face. On the table before him lay one of the letters open. Janet recognized the handwriting to be that of George.

She spurned the letter from her. With a gesture of grievous vexation, her hand pushed it across the table. "It is that which has affected you!" she cried out, with a wail.

"Not so," breathed Thomas. "It was the pain here."

He touched himself below the chest; considerably lower; in the same place where the pain had come before. *Which* pain had taken him? the mental agony arising from George's conduct, or the physical agony of his disease? Probably somewhat of both.

He stretched out his hand towards the letter, making a motion that it should be folded. Bexley, who could not have read a word without his glasses, had it been to save his life, took up the letter, folded it, and placed it in its envelope. Thomas's mind then seemed at rest, and he closed his eyes again.

"I'll step for Mr. Snow now, ma'am," whispered Bexley to Janet. "I shall catch him before he goes out on his round."

Bexley got his hat and went down to Prior's Ash the nearest way, putting out his quickest step. When he reached the surgery, Mr. Snow's assistant was the centre of a whole lot of patients. It was the morning for the poor. Mr. Snow was out.

"Will he be long?" asked Bexley.

"I don't know," was the assistant's reply. "He was called out at six this morning."

"He is wanted at Ashlydyat particularly," said Bexley. "Mr. Godolphin's worse."

"Is he!" returned the assistant, his quick tone indicating concern. And the poor patients looked round, concerned also. Thomas Godolphin had always been their friend. And they were not creditors of the bank, or the fresh grievance might have blotted out the good remembrance of long years.

"I can tell you where he is; and that's at Major Meersom's," continued the assistant. "You might call and speak to him if you like: it is on your road home."

Bexley hastened away to Major Meersom's, and succeeded in seeing the surgeon. He informed him that his master was worse,—was very ill.

"One of the old attacks of pain, I suppose?" said Mr. Snow.

"Yes, sir," answered Bexley. "He was taken while he was reading his letters. Miss Janet thought it might be some ill news or other that put him out."

"Ah," said Mr. Snow, and there was a world of emphasis on the

monosyllable. "Well, I shan't be detained above half an hour longer here, Bexley, and I'll come straight up."

He reached Ashlydyat within the half hour after Bexley, rather than over it: doctors' legs get over the ground quick. Janet saw his approach, and came into the hall to meet him. She was looking very sad and pale.

"Another attack, I hear," began Mr. Snow, in his unceremonious mode of salutation. "Bothered into it, no doubt. Bexley says it came on when he was reading letters."

"Yes," answered Janet in acquiescence, her tone a resentful one. "The handwriting of the letter was George's, I saw: and nothing pleasant could come from him."

Mr. Snow gave a grunt as he turned towards the stairs. "Not there," interposed Janet. "He is in the breakfast-room."

With the wan white look upon his face, with the moisture of pain still upon his brow, lay Thomas Godolphin. He was on the sofa now; but he partially rose from it and assumed a sitting posture when the surgeon entered.

A few professional questions and answers, and then Mr. Snow began to grumble. "Did I not warn you that you must have perfect tranquillity?" cried he. "Rest of body and of mind?"

"You did. But how am I to get it? Even now, I ought to be at the bank, facing the trouble there."

"Where's George?" sharply asked Mr. Snow.

"In London," replied Thomas Godolphin. But he said it in no complaining accent: neither did his tone invite further comment.

Mr. Snow was one who did not wait for an invitation in such a cause, ere he spoke. "It is just one of two things, Mr. Godolphin. Either George must come back and face this worry, or else you'll die."

"I shall die, however it may be,

Snow," was the reply of Thomas Godolphin.

"So will most of us, I expect," returned the doctor. "But there's no necessity for our being helped on to it by others, ages before death would come of itself. What's your brother at, in London?"

"I really do not know."

"Amusing himself, of course. What's his address?"

"That I do not know."

"Who does know it? His wife?"

"I think it likely she does now. I have not made the inquiry of her."

"Well, he must be got here."

Thomas shook his head. The action, as implying a negative, aroused the wrath of Mr. Snow. "Do you want to die?" he asked. "One would think it, by your keeping your brother away."

"There is no person would be more glad to see my brother here than I," returned Thomas Godolphin. "If—if it were expedient that he should come."

"Need there be affected concealment between us, Mr. Godolphin?" resumed the surgeon, after a pause. "You must be aware that I have heard the rumor afloat. A doctor hears every thing, you know. You are uncertain whether it would be safe for George to come back to Prior's Ash."

"It is something of that, Snow."

"But now, what is there against him—it is of no use to mince the matter—besides those bonds of Lord Averil's?"

"There's nothing else against him. At least, in—in—" He did not go on. He could not bring his lips to say of his brother—"in a criminal point of view."

"Nothing else of which unpleasant legal cognizance can be taken," freely interposed Mr. Snow. "Well, now, it is my opinion that there's not a shadow of fear to be entertained from Lord Averil. He is your old and firm friend, Mr. Godolphin."

"He has been mine,—yes. Not

much of George's. Most men in such a case of—of loss, would resent it, without reference to former friendship. I am not at any certainty, you see: and therefore I cannot take the responsibility of saying to my brother 'It is safe for you to return.' Lord Averil has never been near me since. I argue ill from it."

"He has not been with you for the best of all possible reasons,—that he has been away from Prior's Ash," explained Mr. Snow.

"He has been away? I did not know it."

"He has, then. He was called away unexpectedly by some relative's illness, a day or two after your house was declared bankrupt. He may have refrained from calling on you just at the time of that happening, from motives of delicacy."

"True," replied Thomas Godolphin. But his tone was not a hopeful one. "When does he return?"

"He has returned. He came back last night."

There was a pause. Thomas Godolphin broke it. "I wish you could give me something to avert or mitigate these sharp attacks of pain, Snow," he said. "It is agony, in fact; not pain."

"I know it," replied Mr. Snow. "Where's the use of my attempting to give you any thing? You don't take my prescription."

Thomas lifted his eyes in some surprise. "I have taken all that you desired me."

"No you have not. I prescribe tranquillity of mind and body. You take neither."

Thomas Godolphin leaned a little nearer to the doctor, and paused before he answered. "Tranquillity of mind, for me, has passed. I can never know it again. Were my life to be prolonged, the great healer of all things, Time, might bring it to me in a degree: but, for that, I shall not live. Snow, you must know this to be the case, under the calamity which has fallen upon my head."

"It ought to have fallen upon your

brother's head, not upon yours," was the rejoinder of the surgeon, spoken crossly, in his inability to contradict Mr. Godolphin's words. "At any rate, you cannot go on any longer, facing this business in person."

"I must indeed. There is no help for it."

"And suppose it kills you?" was the retort.

"If I could help going, I would," said Thomas. "But there is no help. One of us must be there; and George cannot. You are not ignorant of the laws of bankruptcy."

"It is another nail in your coffin," grunted Mr. Snow, as he took his leave.

He went direct to the bank. He asked to see Mrs. George Godolphin. Maria, in her pretty morning-dress of lavender-spotted muslin, was seated with Meta on her knees. She had been reading the child a Bible-story, and was now talking to her in a low voice,—her own face, so gentle, so pure, and so sad, bent towards the little one upturned to it.

"Well, young lady, and how are all the dolls?" was the surgeon's greeting. "Will you send her away to play with them, Mrs. George?"

Meta ran on the errand. She intended to come bustling down with her arms full. Mr. Snow took his seat opposite Maria.

"Why does your husband not come back?" he abruptly asked.

The question seemed to turn Maria's heart to sickness. She opened her lips to answer, but stopped in hesitation. Mr. Snow resumed:

"His staying away is killing Thomas Godolphin. I prescribe tranquillity for him; total rest: instead of which he is obliged to come here day after day, and be in a continuous scene of turmoil. Your husband must return, Mrs. George Godolphin."

"Y—es," she faintly answered, lacking the courage to say that considerations for his personal security might forbid it.

"Murder will not mend these unhappy matters, Mrs. George Godol-

phin; nor would it be a desirable ending to them. And it will be nothing less than murder, if he does not come back, for Mr. Godolphin will surely die."

All Maria's pulses seemed to beat the quicker. "Is Mr. Godolphin worse?" she asked.

"He is considerably worse. I have been called in to him this morning. My last orders to him were, not to attempt to come to the bank. His answer was, that he must come; that there was no help for it. I believe there is no help for it, George being away. You must get him home, Mrs. George."

She looked sadly blank, sadly perplexed. Mr. Snow read it correctly. "My dear, I think there would be no hazard, Lord Averil being a personal friend of Mr. Godolphin's. I think there's none for another reason—that if the viscount's intention had been to stir unpleasantly in the affair, he would have done it ere this."

"Yes—I have thought of that," she answered.

"And now I must go again," he said, rising. "I wish to-day was twenty-four hours long for the work I have to do in it; but I spared a few minutes to call in and tell you this. Get your husband here, for the sake of his good brother."

The tears were in Maria's eyes. She could scarcely think of Thomas Godolphin and his unmerited troubles without their rising. Mr. Snow saw the wet eyelashes, and laid his hand on the smoothly-parted hair.

"You have had your share of sorrow just now, child," he said; "more than you ought to have. It is making you look like a ghost. Why does he leave you to battle it out alone?" added Mr. Snow, his anger overmastering him, as he gazed at her pale face, her rising sobs. "Prior's Ash is crying shame upon him. Are you and his brother of less account than he, in his own eyes, that he should abandon you to it?"

She strove to excuse her husband—he was her husband, in spite of that

cruel calamity divulged by Margery—but Mr. Snow would not listen. He was in a hurry he said, and went bustling out of the door, nearly upsetting Meta, with her dolls, who was bustling in.

Maria sent the child to the nursery again after Mr. Snow's departure, and stood, her head pressed against the frame of the open window, looking unconsciously on to the terrace, and revolving the words recently spoken. "It is killing Thomas Godolphin. It will be nothing less than murder, if George does not come back."

Every fibre of her frame was thrilling to it in answer; every generous impulse of her heart was stirred to its depths. He ought to be back. She had long thought so. For her sake—but she was nothing; for Thomas Godolphin's; for her husband's own reputation. Down deep in her heart she thrust that dreadful revelation of his falsity, and strove to bury it, as an English wife and gentlewoman has no resource but to do. Ay! to bury it; and to keep it buried! though the concealment eat away her life—as that scarlet letter A, you have read of, eat into the bosom of another woman renowned in story. It seemed to Maria that the time was come when she must inquire a little into the actual state of affairs, instead of hiding her head and spending her days in the indulgence of her fear and grief. If the whole world spoke against him,—if the whole world had cause to speak,—she was his wife still, and his interests and welfare were hers. Were it possible that any effort she could make would bring him back, she must make it.

The words of Mr. Snow still rang in her ears. How was she to set about it? A few minutes given to reflection, her aching brow pressed on the cold window-frame, and she turned and rang the bell. When the servant appeared, she sent him into the bank with a request that Mr. Hurde would come and speak with her for five minutes.

Mr. Hurde was not long in obeying the summons. He appeared with a

pen behind his ear, and his spectacles pushed up on his brow.

It was not a pleasant task, and Maria had to swallow a good many lumps in her throat before she could make known precisely what she wanted. "Would Mr. Hurde tell her the exact state of things? What there was, or was not, against her husband."

Mr. Hurde gave no very satisfactory reply. He took off his glasses and wiped them. Maria had invited him to a chair, and sat near him, her elbow leaning on the table, and her face slightly bent. Mr. Hurde did not know what Mrs. George Godolphin had or had not heard, or how far it would be expedient for him to speak. She guessed at his dilemma.

"Tell me all, Mr. Hurde," she said, lifting her face to his with imploring eagerness. "It is well that you should, for nothing can be more cruel than the uncertainty and suspense I am in. I know about Lord Averil's bonds."

"Ay?" he replied. But he said no more.

"I'll tell you why I ask," said Maria. "Mr. Snow has been here, and he informs me that the coming to the bank daily, the worry, is killing Mr. Godolphin. He says Mr. George ought to be back in his brother's place. I think if he can come, he ought."

"I wish he could," returned Mr. Hurde, more quickly and impressively than he usually spoke. "It is killing Mr. Godolphin,—that, and the bankruptcy together. But I don't know that it would be safe for him, on account of these very bonds,—Lord Averil's."

"What else is there against him?" breathed Maria.

"There's nothing else."

"Nothing else?" she echoed, a shade of hope lighting up her face and her heart.

"Nothing else. That is, nothing that he can be made criminally responsible for," added the old clerk, with marked emphasis, as if he thought that there was a great deal more, had

the law but taken cognizance of it. If Lord Averil should decline to prosecute, he might come back to-morrow. He must be back soon, whether or not, to answer to his bankruptcy; or else——"

"Or else,—what?" asked Maria, falteringly, for Mr. Hurde had stopped.

"Or else never come back at all,—never be seen, in fact, in England. That's how it is, ma'am."

"Would it not be well to ascertain Lord Averil's feelings upon the subject, Mr. Hurde?" she rejoined, breaking a silence.

"It would be very well, if it could be done. But who is to do it?"

Maria was beginning to think that she would. "You are sure there is nothing else against him?" she reiterated.

"Nothing that need prevent his returning to Prior's Ash."

There was no more to be answered, and Mr. Hurde withdrew. Maria lost herself in thought. Could she dare to go to Lord Averil and beseech his clemency? Her brow flushed at the thought. But she had been inured to humiliation of late, and it would be but another drop in the cup of pain. Oh, the relief it would be of the dreadful suspense, the uncertainty, end! The suspense was awful. Even if it ended in the worst, it would be almost a relief. If Lord Averil should be intending to prosecute, who knew but he might forego the intention at her prayers? If so,—if so,—why, she should ever say that God had sent her to him.

There was the reverse side of the picture. A haughty reception of her—for was she not the wife of the man who had wronged him?—and a cold refusal. How she should bear that she did not like to think. Should she go? Could she go? Even now her heart was failing her——

What noise was that? A sort of commotion in the hall? She opened the dining-room door and glanced out. Thomas Godolphin, leaning on his servant Bexley's arm, had come, and

was entering the bank, there to go through his day's work, looking more fit to be in his coffin. It was the turning of the scale.

"I will go to him!" murmured Maria to herself. "I will go to Lord Averil and hear all there may be to hear. Let me do it! Let me do it!—for the sake of Thomas Godolphin!"

CHAPTER LIII.

A VISIT OF PAIN.

THE proposed application of Maria Godolphin to Lord Averil may appear but a very slight affair to the careless and thoughtless,—one of those trifling annoyances which must occasionally beset our course through life. Why should Maria have shrunk from it with that shivering sensitive dread?—and have set about it as a forced duty, with a burning cheek and failing heart? Consider what it was that she undertook, you who would regard it lightly; pause an instant and look at it in all its bearings. Her husband, George Godolphin, had robbed Lord Averil of sixteen thousand pounds; or their value. It is of no use to mince the matter. He had shown himself neither more nor less than a common robber, a thief, a swindler. He, a man of the same social stamp as Lord Averil, moving in the same sphere of county society, had fallen from his pedestal by his own fraudulent act, down to a level (in crime) with the very dregs of mankind. Perhaps no one in the whole world could ever feel it in the same humiliating degree as did his wife,—unless it might be Thomas Godolphin. Both of them, unfortunately for them,—yes, I say it advisedly,—unfortunately for them in this bitter storm of shame,—both of them were of that honorable, upright, ultra-refined nature on which such a blow falls far more cruelly than death. Death! death! If it does come, it

brings at least one recompense: the humiliation and the trouble, the bitter pain and the carking care are escaped from, left behind forever in the cruel world. Oh, if these miserable ill-doers could but bear in their own person all the pain and shame!—if George Godolphin could but have stood out on a pinnacle in the face of Prior's Ash and expiated all his folly alone! But it could not be. It never can or shall be. As the sins of the people in the Israelitish camp were laid upon the innocent and unhappy scape-goat, the sins which men commit in the present day are heaped upon unconscious and guileless heads. As the poor scape-goat wandered away with his hidden burden into the remote wilderness, away from the haunts of man, so do these other heavily-laden ones stagger away with their unseen load, only striving to hide themselves from the eyes of men—anywhere—in patience and silence—praying to die.

Every humiliation which George Godolphin had brought upon himself—every harsh word cast to him by the world—every innate sense of guilt and shame, which must accompany such conduct, was being expiated by his wife. Yes, it fell worst upon her: Thomas was but his brother; she was part and parcel of himself. But that God's ways are not as our ways, we might feel tempted to ask why it should be that these terrible trials are so often brought upon the head of such women as Maria Godolphin,—timid, good, gentle, sensitive,—the least of all able to bear them. That such is frequently the case, is indisputable. In no way was Maria fitted to cope with this. Many might have felt less this very expedition to Lord Averil: to her it was as the very bitterest humiliation. She had hitherto met Lord Averil as an equal; she had entertained him at her house as such; she had stood before him always in her calm self-possession, with a clear face and a clear conscience. And now she must go to him, a humble petitioner; bow

before him in all her self-conscious disgrace; implore him to save her husband from the consequences of his criminal act,—the standing at the felon's bar and its sequel, the working at the hulks. She must virtually ask Lord Averil to put up quietly with the loss of the sixteen thousand pounds, and to make no sign.

With a cheek flushed with emotion, with a heart sick unto faintness, Maria Godolphin stepped out of her house in the full blaze of the midday sun. A gloomy day, showing herself less conspicuously to the curious gazers of Prior's Ash had been more welcome to her. She had gone out so rarely since the crash came—but that once, in fact, when she went to see her mother—that her appearance was the signal for a commotion. "There's Mrs. George Godolphin! There's Mrs. George Godolphin!" and Prior's Ash flocked to its doors and its windows as if Mrs. George Godolphin had been some unknown curiosity in the animal world, never yet exhibited to the eyes of the public. Maria shielded her burning face from observation as well as she could with her small parasol, and passed on.

Lord Averil, she had found, was staying with Colonel Max, and her way led her past the rectory of All Souls, past the house of Lady Sarah Grame. Lady Sarah was at the window, and Maria bowed. The bow was not returned. It was not returned!—Lady Sarah turned away with a haughty movement, a cold glance. It told cruelly upon Maria. Had any thing been wanted to prove to her the estimation in which she was now held by Prior's Ash, that would have done it.

The distance from her own house to that of Colonel Max was about two miles. Rather a long walk for Maria at the present time, for she was not in a condition of health to endure fatigue. It was a square, moderate-sized, red-brick house, standing considerably back from the high-road, and as Maria turned into its avenue of approach, what with the walk, and

what with the dread apprehension of the coming interview, the sick faintness at her heart had begun to show itself upon her face. The insult offered her (could it be called any thing less?) by Lady Sarah Grame had somehow seemed an earnest of what she might expect from Lord Averil. Lady Sarah had not a tenth of the grievance against the bank that the viscount had.

Nobody ever approached the colonel's house without having their ears saluted with the baying and snarling of his fox-hounds, whose kennels were close by. In happier days—days so recently past, that they might almost be counted as present—when Maria had gone to that house to dinner-parties, she had drawn closer to George in the carriage, and whispered how much she should dislike it if he kept a pack of fox-hounds near their dwelling-place. Never, never should she drive to that house in state again, her husband by her side. Oh, the contrast it presented,—that time and this! Now she was approaching it like the criminal that the world thought her, hiding her face with her veil,—hiding herself, so far as she might, from observation.

She reached the door, and paused ere she rang: her pulses were throbbing wildly, her heart beat as if it would burst its bounds. The nearer that the interview drew, the more formidable did it appear, the less able herself to face it. The temptation came over her—to go back. It assailed her very strongly, and she might have yielded to it, but for the thought of Thomas Godolphin.

She rang at the bell,—a timid ring. One of those rings that seem to announce the self-humble applicant,—and who was the wife of George Godolphin now, that she should proclaim herself with pomp and clatter? A man settling himself into his green livery coat opened the door.

"Is Lord Averil within?"

"No."

The servant was a stranger, and did not know her. He may have thought

It curious that a lady, who spoke in a low tone, and scarcely raised her eyes through her veil, should come there alone to inquire after Lord Averil. He resumed, rather pertly:

"His lordship walked out an hour ago with the colonel. It's quite unbeknown what time they may come in."

In her shrinking dread of the interview, it almost seemed a relief. Strange to say, so fully absorbed had she been in the anticipated pain, that the contingency of his being out had not crossed her mind. The man stood with the door in his hand, half open, half closed: had he invited her to walk in and sit down, she might have done so, for the sake of the rest. But he did not.

Retracing her steps down the path, she branched off into a dark walk, overshadowed by trees, just within the entrance-gate, and sat down upon a bench. Now, the reaction was coming: the disappointment: all that mental agony, all that weary way of fatigue, and not to see him! It must all be gone over again on the morrow.

She threw her hot veil back; she pressed her throbbing forehead against the thick trunk of the old oak-tree: and in that same moment some one entered the gate on his way to the house, saw her, and turned short round to approach her. It was Lord Averil.

Was the moment really come? Every drop of blood in her body seemed to rush to her heart, and send it on with a tumultuous bound,—every sense of the mind seemed to leave her,—every fear that the imagination can conjure up, seemed to rise up in menace. She rose to her feet and gazed at him, her sight partially leaving her, her face changing to a ghastly whiteness.

But when he hastened forward and caught her hands in the deepest respect and sympathy; when he bent over her, saying some confused words—confused to her ear—of surprise at seeing her, of pity for her apparent illness; when he addressed her with

every token of the old kindness, the consideration of bygone days, then the revulsion of feeling overcame her, and Maria burst into a flood of distressing tears, and sobbed passionately.

"I am fatigued with the walk," she said, with a lame attempt at apology when her emotion was subsiding. "I came over to speak to you, Lord Averil. I—I—have something to ask you."

"But you should not have walked," he answered, in a kind tone of remonstrance. "Why did you not drop me a note? I would have come to you."

She felt as one about to faint. She had taken off her gloves, her small, white hands were unconsciously writhing themselves together in her lap, showing how great was her inward pain; her trembling lips, pale with agitation, refused to bring out their words connectedly.

"I want you to be merciful to my husband. Not to prosecute."

The gasping words were breathed in a whisper; the rushing tide of shame changed her face to crimson. Lord Averil did not for the moment answer, and the delay, the fear of non-success imparted to her somewhat of courage.

"For Thomas's sake," she said. "I ask it for Thomas's sake."

"My dear Mrs. Godolphin," he was beginning, but she interrupted him, her tone changing to one of desperate energy.

"Oh, be merciful, be merciful! Be merciful to my husband, Lord Averil, for his brother's sake. Nay—for George's own sake, for my sake, for my poor child's sake, Meta's. He can never come back to Prior's Ash, unless you will be merciful to him; he cannot come now, and Thomas has to go through all the worry and the misery, and it is killing him. Mr. Snow came to me this morning and said it was killing him; and said that George must come back if he would save his brother's life: and I spoke to Mr. Hurde, and he said there was nothing to prevent his coming back,

except the danger from Lord Averil. And then I made my mind up to come to you."

"I shall not prosecute him, Mrs. George Godolphin. My long friendship with his brother debars it. He may come back to-morrow, in perfect assurance that he has nothing to fear from me."

"It is true?—I may rely upon you?" she gasped.

"Indeed you may. I have never had a thought of prosecuting. I cannot describe to you the pain that it has been productive of to me: I mean the affair altogether, not my particular loss: but that pain would be greatly increased were I to bring myself to prosecute one bearing the name of Godolphin. I am sorry for George; deeply sorry for him. Report says that he has allowed himself to fall into bad hands, and could not extricate himself."

The worst was over; the best known: and Maria leaned against the friendly trunk and untied her bonnet-strings, and wiped the moisture from her now-pallid face. Exhaustion was now supervening. Lord Averil rose and held out his arm to her.

"Let me take you to the house and give you a glass of sherry."

"I could not take it, thank you. I would rather not go to the house."

"Colonel Max will be very glad to see you. I have but just parted with him. He went round by the stables."

She shook her head. "I do not like to see any one now."

The subdued words, the saddened tone seemed to speak volumes. Lord Averil glanced down at her compassionately. "This has been a grievous trial to you, Mrs. Godolphin."

"Yes," she answered, very quietly. Had she spoken but a word of what it had really been to her, emotion might have broken forth.

"But you must not let it affect you too greatly," he remonstrated. "As I fear it is doing."

"I can't help it," she whispered. "I knew nothing of it, and it came upon me like a clap of thunder. I

never had so much as a suspicion that any thing was going wrong: had people asked me what bank was the most stable throughout the kingdom, I should have said ours. I never suspected evil: and yet the blame is being cast to me. Lord Averil, I—I—did not know about those bonds."

"No, no," he warmly answered. "You need not tell me that. I wish you could let the trouble pass over you lightly."

The trouble! She clasped her hands to pain. "Don't speak of it," she wailed. "At times it seems more than I can bear. But for Meta, I should be glad to die."

What was Lord Averil to answer? He could only give her the earnest sympathy of his whole heart. "A man who can bring deliberately this misery upon the wife of his bosom deserves hanging," was his bitter thought.

"What are you going to do?" he asked. "Surely not to attempt to walk back?"

"I shall take my time over it," she answered. "It is not much of a walk."

"Too much for you at present," he gravely said. "Let me send you home in one of Colonel Max's carriages."

"No, oh no," she quickly answered. "Indeed I have not miscalculated my strength: I can walk perfectly well, and would prefer to do so."

"Then you will come into the house and take a rest first."

"I had rather not. Let me sit here a little longer: it is resting me."

"I will be back immediately," he said, walking from her very quickly, and plunging into a narrow path which was a short cut to the house. When he reappeared he bore a glass of wine and biscuit on a plate.

She drank the wine. The biscuit she put back with a shiver. "I never can eat any thing now," she said, lifting her eyes to his to beseech his pardon.

When she at length rose, Lord Averil took her hand and laid it within his arm. She supposed he meant to escort her to the gate.

“I have not said a word of thanks to you,” she murmured, when they reached it. “I am very, very grateful to you, very sensible of your kindness; but I cannot speak of it. My heart seems broken.”

She had halted and held out her hand in farewell. Lord Averil did not release her, but walked on. “If you will walk home, Mrs. George Godolphin, you must at least allow my arm to help you.”

“I could not; indeed I could not,” she said, stopping resolutely, though the tears were dropping from her eyes. “I must go back alone,—I would rather.”

Lord Averil yielded partially. The first part of the road was lonely, and he must see her so far. “I should have called on Thomas Godolphin before this, but I have been away,” he remarked, as they went on. “I will go and see him,—perhaps this afternoon.”

“He will be so thankful to hear of this! It will be like a renewed lease of life. They have been fearful at Ashlydyat.”

An exceedingly vexed expression crossed Lord Averil’s lips. “I thought they had known me better at Ashlydyat,” he said. “Thomas, at any rate. Feared me!”

At length Maria would not allow him to go farther, and Lord Averil clasped her hand in both of his: “Promise me to try and keep up your spirits,” he said. “For your husband’s sake.”

“Yes; as well as I can,” she replied, in a broken tone. “Thank you! thank you ever, Lord Averil!”

She called in at the rectory as she passed it, and sat for a while with her father and mother. But it was pain to her to do so. The bitter wrong inflicted upon them by her husband, was making itself heard in her heart in loud reproaches. The bitter wrong of another kind dealt out to herself by him, was all too present then. They knew how she had idolized him; they must have known how blindly misplaced that idolatry was; and the

red flush mounted to Maria’s brow at the thought.

Oh, if she could but redeem the past, so far as they were concerned! It seemed that that would be enough. If she could but restore peace and comfort to their home, refund to her father what he had lost, how thankful she should be! She would move heaven and earth if that might accomplish it,—she would spend her own days in the workhouse,—pass them by a roadside hedge, and think nothing of it,—if by those means she could remove the wrong done. She lifted her eyes to the blue sky, almost asking that a miracle might be wrought, to repair the injury which had been dealt out to her father. Ah me! If Heaven repaired all the injuries inflicted by man upon man, it would surely have no time for other works of mercy!

CHAPTER LIV.

A SHOW IN THE STREETS OF PRIOR’S ASH.

BARELY had Maria departed and closed the rectory-gate behind her, when she encountered a stylish vehicle as high as a mountain, dashing along at an alarming pace, with a couple of frantic dogs behind it. It was that “turn out” you have heard of, belonging to Mrs. Charlotte Pain. Mrs. Charlotte Pain was in it, resplendent as the sun, dazzling the admiring eyes of Prior’s Ash in a gown of pink *moiré* antique, and a head gear which appeared to be composed of pink and white feathers and a glittering silver aigrette, its form altogether not unlike a French gendarme’s hat, if you have the pleasure of knowing that awe-giving article. At the sight of Maria she pulled the horses up with a jerk: upon which ensued some skirmishing and scattering abroad of dust, the animals, both horses and dogs, not approving of so summary a check; but Charlotte was resolute, and her

whip effective. She then flung the reins to the groom who sat beside her, jumped out, and held out her hand to Maria.

Maria accepted it. The revelation gratuitously bestowed on her by Margery was beating its words upon her memory, and her brow, face, and neck had flushed to a glowing crimson. Some might have flung the offered hand aside, and picked up their skirts with a jerk, and sailed away with an air: but Maria was a gentlewoman.

"How well you look!" exclaimed Charlotte, regarding her in some surprise. "Perhaps you are warm? I say, Mrs. George"—dropping her voice to a whisper—"where do you think I am bound to?"

"I cannot tell."

"To see Lord Averil. He is back again, and stopping at old Max's. I am going to badger him out of a promise not to hurt George Godolphin,—about those rubbishy bonds, you know. I won't leave him until I get it."

"Yes," said Maria.

"I will have it. Or—war to the knife, my lord! I should like to see him, or anybody else, attempt to refuse me any thing I stood out for," she added, with a triumphantly saucy glance, meant for the absent viscount. "Poor George has nobody here to fight his battles for him, and he can't return to enter on them in person; so it's well that some friend should do it. They are saying in the town this morning, that Averil has returned for the purpose of prosecuting: I mean to cut his prosecuting claws off."

"It is a mistake," said Maria. "Lord Averil has no intention of prosecuting."

"How do you know?" bluntly asked Charlotte.

"I have just seen him."

"You don't mean to say you have been over to old Max's?" exclaimed Charlotte, opening her brilliant black eyes very wide.

"Yes I have."

"You quiet sly-boots! You have never walked there and back?"

"I don't feel very tired. I have been resting with mamma for half an hour."

"And he's safe—Averil?" eagerly continued Charlotte.

"Quite safe. Remember his long friendship with Thomas Goldolphin."

"Oh, my dear, men forget friendship when their pockets are in question," was the light remark of Charlotte. "You are *sure*, though, Averil's not deceiving you? I don't much think he is one to do a dirty trick of that sort, but I have lived long enough to learn that you must prove a man before you trust him."

"Lord Averil is not deceiving me," quietly answered Maria. "He has given me a message for my husband."

"Then there's no necessity for my going to him," said Charlotte. "Let me drive you home, Mrs. George Godolphin. I am sure you are fatigued. I never saw any one change countenance as you do. A few minutes ago you looked vulgarly hot, and now you are pale enough for the grave. Step in. James, you must change to the back-seat."

Step into that formidably high thing, and sit by Mrs. Charlotte Pain's side, and dash through Prior's Ash! Maria wondered whether the gossips of Prior's Ash—who, as it seemed, had made so free with gay George's name—or Margery, would stare the most. She declined the invitation.

"You are afraid," cried Charlotte. "Well, it's a great misfortune, these timid temperaments, but I suppose they can't be cured. Kate Verrall's another coward: but she's not as bad as you. Toss me my parasol, James."

James handed his mistress a charming toy of pink moire antique silk and point-lace, mounted on a handle of carved ivory. Charlotte put it up before her face, and turned to accompany Maria.

Maria put her parasol up before her face thankful that it might serve to shield it, if only partially, from the

curious eyes of Prior's Ash. Remembering the compliments that Prior's Ash had been kind enough to pass on her "simplicity," she would not exactly have chosen her present companion to walk through the streets with. Dame Bond, with her unsteady steps and her snuffy-black gown, would have been preferable of the two.

"But," thought Maria in her generosity, striving to thrust that other unpleasant feeling down deep in her heart, to lose sight of it, "it is really kind of Mrs. Pain to be seen thus publicly with me. Other ladies would be ashamed of me now, I suppose."

They stepped on. Maria with her parasol so close to her face that there was a danger of her running against people; Charlotte turning herself from side to side, flirting the costly little pink toy as one flirts a fan, bowing and scraping to all she met. The dogs snarled and barked behind; the carriage pranced and curvetted by their side; the unhappy James having his hands full with the horses, which took a high standing, and refused to recognize any controlling mastership save that of Mrs. Charlotte Pain. Altogether, it was a more conspicuous progress than Maria would have chosen: but we are let in for greatness sometimes, you know, against our will. Thus they arrived at the bank, and Maria held out her hand to Charlotte. She *could* not be otherwise than courteous, no matter to whom.

"I am coming in," said Charlotte, bluntly. "Take care what you are about with the horses, James."

Maria led the way to the dining-room. All was as it used to be in that charming room; furniture, pictures, elegant trifles for show or for use; all was the same: save—that those things belonged not now to Maria and her husband, but were noted down as the property of others,—soon, soon to be put up for sale! Charlotte's rich moire antique came to an anchor on a sofa, and she untied

the string of the gendarme hat, and pushed it back on her head.

"I am going to leave Prior Ash."

"To leave Prior's Ash!" repeated Maria. "When?"

"Within a week of this. Lady Godolphin's coming back to the Folly."

"But—Lady Godolphin cannot come back to it without giving you due notice to quit?" debated Maria.

"It's all arranged," said Charlotte, opening her mouth with a loud yawn. "Lady Godolphin wrote to Verrall and the arrangements have been agreed upon amicably. Lady Godolphin foregoes a certain portion of rent, and we go out immediately. I am very glad, do you know. I had made my mind up not to stay. As to the Verralls, it may be said that they virtually took leave of the Folly long ago. Uncommonly glad I shall be to leave it," repeated Charlotte, with emphasis.

"Why?"

"Who'd care to stay at Prior's Ash, after all this bother? You and George will be leaving it for London, you know,—and I hope it won't be long first. You must make me useful up there, Mrs. George. I'll——"

"Who told you we were going to leave for London?" interrupted Maria, in astonishment.

"Nobody told me. But of course you will. Do you suppose George Godolphin will care to stop amongst this set? Not he. He'd see Prior's Ash promenading first. What tie has he here, now Ashlydyat's gone? Verrall talks of buying a hunting-box in Leicestershire."

"Does he," replied Maria, mechanically, her thoughts buried elsewhere.

"Buying or hiring one. I should hire; and then there's no bother if you want to make a fitting. But Verrall is one who takes nobody's counsel but his own. What a worry it will be!" added Charlotte, after a pause.

Maria raised her eyes. She did not understand the question.

"The packing-up of the things at

the Folly," explained Charlotte. "We begin to-morrow morning. I must be at the head of it, for it's of no use trusting that sort of work entirely to servants. Bon jour, petite coquette ! Et les poupees ?"

The diversion was caused by the flying entrance of Miss Meta. The young lady was not yet particularly well up in the Gallic language, and only half understood. She went straight up to Mrs. Pain, threw her soft, sweet eyes right into that lady's flashing black ones, rested her pretty arms upon the moire antique, and spoke out with her accustomed boldness.

"Where are the dogs now ?"

"Chained down in the pit-hole," responded Mrs. Pain.

"Margery says there is no pit-hole, and the dogs were not chained down," asserted Meta.

"Margery's nothing but an old woman: don't you believe her. If she tells stories again we'll chain her down with the dogs."

"Two of the dogs are outside," said Meta.

"Not the same dogs, child," returned Mrs. Pain, with cool equanimity. "They are street-dogs, those are."

"They are with the carriage," persisted Meta. "They are barking around it."

"Are they barking? They can see Margery's face at the nursery window, and are frightened at it. Dogs always bark at ugly old women's faces. You tell Margery so."

"Margery's not ugly."

"You innocent little simpleton ! She's ugly enough to frighten the crows."

How long the colloquy might have continued it is hard to say; certainly Meta would not be the one to give in; but it was interrupted by Margery herself. A note had just been delivered at the house for Mrs. George Godolphin, and Margery, who probably was glad of the excuse for entering, brought it in. She never looked at all towards Mrs. Pain; she came

straight up to her mistress, apparently ignoring Charlotte's presence, but you should have seen the expression of her face. The coronet on the seal of the letter imparted a suspicion to Maria that it came from Lord Averil, and her heart sunk within her. Could he be withdrawing his promise of clemency ?

"Who brought this ?" she asked, in a subdued tone.

"A servant on horseback, ma'am."

Charlotte had started up, catching at her feathers, for Pierce was at the dining-room door now, saying that the horses were alarmingly restive. "Good-afternoon, Mrs. George Godolphin," she called out, unceremoniously, as she hastened away. "I'll come and spend a quiet hour with you before I leave for town. Adieu, petite diablesse ! I'd have you up to-morrow for a farewell visit, but that I'm afraid you might get nailed down with the furniture in some of the packing-cases."

Away she went. Meta was hastening after her, but was caught up by Margery with a gasp and a sob,—as if she had been saving her from some imminent danger. Maria opened the letter with trembling fingers.

"MY DEAR MRS. GODOLPHIN :—It has occurred to me, since I parted from you, that you may wish to have the subject of our conversation confirmed in writing. I hereby assure you that I shall take no legal proceedings whatever against your husband on account of my lost bonds, and you may tell him from me that he need not, on that score, remain away from Prior's Ash.

"I hope you have reached home without too much fatigue.

"Believe me, ever sincerely yours,
"AVERIL."

"How kind he is !" burst involuntarily from Maria's lips.

The words were drowned in a noise outside. Charlotte had contrived to ascend to her seat in spite of the dancing horses. She stood up in the

high carriage, as George Godolphin had once done at that same door, and by dint of strength and skill she subdued them to control. Turning their fiery heads, scattering the assembled multitude right and left, nodding pleasantly to the applause vouchsafed her, Mrs. Charlotte Pain and the turnout disappeared with a clatter, amidst the rolling of wheels, the barking of dogs, and the intense admiration of the gaping populace.

CHAPTER LV.

UNAVAILING REGRETS.

MISS GODOLPHIN sat at one of the windows facing the west in their home at Ashlydyat,—soon to be their home no more. Her cheek rested pensively on her fingers, as she thought—oh, with what bitterness!—of the grievous past. She had been universally ridiculed for paying heed to the superstitious traditions attaching to the house, and yet how strangely they appeared to be working themselves out. It had begun—Janet seemed to think the ruin had begun—with the departure of her father, Sir George, from Ashlydyat; and the tradition went that when the head of the Godolphins should voluntarily abandon Ashlydyat, the ruin would follow.

Had Sir George's departure brought on the ruin,—been the first end of the thread that led to it? Janet was debating the question in her mind. That she was prone to indulge in superstitious fancies to a degree many would pronounce ridiculously absurd, cannot be denied: but in striving to solve that particular problem she was relinquishing the by-paths of the supernatural for the broad-road of common sense. From the facts that were being brought to light by the bankruptcy, turning themselves up by degrees one after another, it was easy to see that George Godolphin had been seduced into a hornet's nest, and so

been eased of his money. Whether the process had been summary or slow—whether he had walked into it headforemost in blind simplicity—or whether he had only succumbed to it under the most refined Machiavellian craft, brought subtly to bear upon him, was of no consequence to inquire. It is of no consequence to us. He had fallen into the hands of a company of swindlers, who ensnared their victims and transacted their business under the semblance of bill-discounting; and they had brought George to what he was.

Head and chief of this apparently reputable firm was Verrall; and Verrall, there was not a doubt, had been the chief agent in George Godolphin's undoing. But for Sir George Godolphin's quitting Ashlydyat and putting it up in the market to let, Verrall might never have come near Prior's Ash,—never have met Mr. George Godolphin. In that case the chances were that Mr. George would have been a flourishing banker yet. Gay he would have been; needlessly extravagant; scattering his wild oats by the bushel,—but not a man come to ruin and to beggary.

Janet Godolphin was right: it was the quitting of Ashlydyat by her father, and the consequent tenancy of Mr. Verrall, which had been the first link in the chain, terminating in George's disgrace, in their ruin.

She sat there, losing herself in regret after regret. "If my father had not left it!—if he had never married Mrs. Campbell!—if my own dear mother had not died!"—she lost herself, I say, in these regrets, bitter as they were vain.

How many of these useless regrets might embitter the lives of us all! How many do embitter them! If I had but done so-and-so!—if I had but taken the left turning when I took the right!—if I had but known what that man was from the first, and shunned his acquaintance!—if I had but chosen that path in life instead of this one!—if I had, in short, but done the precisely opposite to what I did do!

Vain, vain repinings!—vain, useless, profitless repinings! The only plan is to keep them so far as possible from our hearts. If we could foresee the end of a thing at its beginning,—if we could buy a stock of experience at the onset of life,—if we could, in point of fact, become endowed with the light of divine wisdom, what different men and women the world would see!

But we cannot,—we cannot undo the past. It is ours with all its folly, its short-sightedness, perhaps its guilt. Though we stretch out our yearning and pitiful hands to Heaven in their movement of agony,—though we wail aloud our bitter cry, Lord, pardon me,—heal me,—help me!—though we beat on our remorseful bosom and tear away its flesh piecemeal in bitter repentance, we cannot undo the past. We cannot undo it. The past remains to us unaltered,—and must remain so forever.

Perhaps some idea of this kind, of the utter uselessness of these regrets,—but no personal remorse attached to *her*,—was making itself heard in the mind of Miss Godolphin, even through her grief. She had clasped her hands upon her bosom now, and bent her head downwards, completely lost in retrospect. One drop in the Godolphin's full cup of pain had been removed from it that day,—the knowledge that Viscount Averil did not intend to institute criminal proceedings against George. When Thomas had returned home to dinner he brought the news.

"Did you say Maria walked over to Colonel Max's?" Janet suddenly lifted her eyes to ask.

It was to Thomas that she spoke. He sat opposite to her at the other corner of the window. He, too, appeared to be buried in thought.

"Walked? Yes, she walked."

"Imprudent!" was the short remark returned by Janet.

"She said it had not tired her. I think," continued Thomas, "there are times when the mind is all predominant,—when its emotions, whether of

sorrow or of joy, are so intense that all bodily consciousness is lost, and fatigue is not felt. It was no doubt so to-day with Maria."

Janet said no more. She rose presently to leave the room, and almost immediately afterwards Bexley appeared, showing in Lord Averil.

He hastened forward to prevent Thomas Godolphin's rising. Laying one hand upon his shoulder and the other on his hands, he pressed him down, and would not let him rise.

"How am I to thank you?" were the first words spoken by Thomas,—in reference to the clemency shown to his brother.

"Hush!" said Lord Averil. "My dear friend, you are allowing these things to affect you more than they ought. I see the greatest change in you, even in this short time."

The slanting rays of the declining sun were falling on the face of Thomas Godolphin, lighting up its fading vitality. The cheeks were thinner, the weak hair seemed scantier, the truthful gray eyes had acquired an habitual expression of pain. Lord Averil leaned over him and noted it all.

"Sit down," said Thomas, drawing the chair which had been occupied by Janet nearer to him.

Lord Averil accepted the invitation, but did not release the hand. "I understand you have been doubting me," he said. "You might have known me better. We have been friends a long while."

Thomas Godolphin only answered by a pressure of the hand he held. Old and familiar friends though they were, understanding each other's hearts almost, as these close friends should do, it was yet a most painful point to Thomas Godolphin. On the one side there was his brother's crime: on the other there was the loss of that large sum to Lord Averil. Thomas had to do battle with pain perpetually now: but there were moments when the conflict was nearer and sharper than at others. This was one.

They subsided into conversation,—its theme, as was natural, the bank-

raptcy and its attendant details. Lord Averil found that Thomas was casting blame to himself.

"Why should you?" he asked, impulsively. "Is it not enough that the world should do so, without yourself indorsing it?"

A faint smile crossed Thomas Godolphin's face at the thoughtless admission spoken so openly: but he knew, none better, how great a share of blame was dealt out to him. "It is due," he observed to Lord Averil. "I ought not to have reposed trust so implicit in George. Things could not have come to this pass if I had not."

"If we cannot place implicit trust in a brother in whom can we place it?"

"True. But, in my position as the trustee of others, I ought not to have *trusted* that things were going on right. I should have *known* that they were."

They went on to the future. Thomas spoke of the selling up of all things, of their turning out of Ashlydyat. "Is that decree irrevocable?" Lord Averil interrupted. "Must Ashlydyat be sold?"

Thomas was surprised at the question. It was so superfluous a one. "It will be sold very shortly," he said, "to the highest bidder. Any stranger who bids most will get Ashlydyat. I hope," he added, with a half start, as if the possibility occurred to him then for the first time, "that the man Verrall will not become a bidder for it,—and get it! Lady Godolphin turns him from the Folly."

"Never fear," said Lord Averil. "He'll be only too glad to relieve Prior's Ash of his presence. Thomas, can nothing be done to the man? Your brother may have been a willing tool in his hands, but broad whispers are going about that it is Verrall who has reaped the harvest. Can no legal cognizance be taken of it?"

Thomas shook his head. "We may suspect a great deal,—in fact, it is more than suspicion; but we can

prove nothing. The man will rise up triumphant from it all and carry his head higher than ever. I hope, I say, that he will not think of Ashlydyat. They were in it once, you know."

"Why could not Ashlydyat be disposed of by private contract?—by valuation? It might be, if the assignees chose."

"Yes, I suppose it might be."

"I wish you would sell it to me," breathed Lord Averil.

"To you!" repeated Thomas Godolphin. "Ay, indeed. Were you to have Ashlydyat, I should the less keenly regret its passing from the Godolphins."

Lord Averil paused. He appeared to want to say something, but to hesitate in doubt.

"Would it please you that one of the Godolphins should still inhabit it?" he asked, at length.

"I do not understand you," replied Thomas. "There is no chance—I had almost said possibility—of a Godolphin henceforward inhabiting Ashlydyat."

"I hope and trust there is," said Lord Averil, with emotion. "If Ashlydyat is ever to be mine, I shall not care for it unless a Godolphin shares it with me. I speak of your sister, Cecilia."

Thomas sat in calmness, waiting for more. Nothing could stir him greatly now. Lord Averil gave him the outline of the past,—of his love for Cecilia, and her rejection of him.

"There has been something," he continued, "in her manner of late, which has renewed hope within me—otherwise I should not be saying this to you now. Quite of late—since her rejection of me—I have observed what—what—I cannot describe it, Thomas," he broke off. "But I have determined to risk my fate once more. And you—you—loving Cecil as I do—you thought I could prosecute George!"

"But I did not know that you loved Cecil."

"I suppose not. It has seemed to

me, though, that my love must have been patent to the world. You would give her to me, would you not?"

"Ay; thankfully," was the warm answer. "The thought of leaving Cecil unprotected has been one of my cares. Janet and Bessy are older and more experienced. Let me give you one consolation, Averil: that if Cecil has rejected you, she has rejected others. Janet has fancied she had some secret attachment. Can it have been to yourself?"

"If so, why should she have rejected me?"

"In truth I do not know. Cecil has seemed grievously unhappy since these troubles arose,—almost like one who has no further hope in life. George's peril has told upon her."

"His peril?"

"From you."

Lord Averil bit his lips. "Cecil, above all others—unless it were yourself—might have known that he was safe."

A silence ensued. Lord Averil resumed: "There is one upon whom I fear these troubles are telling all too greatly, Thomas,—and that is your brother's wife."

"May God comfort her!" was the involuntary answer that broke from the lips of Thomas Godolphin.

"Had I been ever so harshly inclined, I think the sight of her to-day would have disarmed me. No, no: had I never owned a friendship for you, had I never loved Cecil, there is certainly enough of evil, of cruel, unavoidable evil, which must fall with this calamity, without my adding to it."

"When I brought word home this afternoon that you were well-disposed towards George,—that he had nothing to fear from you,—Cecil burst into tears."

A glow arose to Lord Averil's face. He looked out on the setting sun in silence. "Is your brother sent for?" he presently asked.

"Maria and I have both written for him now. I should think he will come. What is it, Bexley?"

"A message is come from Mrs. Pain, sir, about some of the fixtures at Lady Godolphin's Folly. Mrs. Pain wants to know if you have a list of them. She forgets which belong to the house, and which don't."

Thomas Godolphin said a word of apology to Lord Averil, and left the room. In the hall he met Cecil crossing to it. She went in, quite unconscious who was its inmate. He rose up to welcome her.

A momentary hesitation in her steps, a doubt whether she should not run away again, and then she recalled her senses and went forward.

She recalled what he had done that day for her brother; she went forward to thank him. But ere the thanks had well begun, they came to a summary end, for Cecil had burst into tears.

How it went on, and what was exactly said or done, neither of them could remember afterwards. A very few minutes, and Cecil's head was resting upon his shoulder, all the mistakes of the past cleared up between them.

She might not have confessed to him how long she had loved,—all since that long past time when they were together at Mrs. Averil's,—but for her dread lest he might fear that she was only accepting him now out of gratitude,—gratitude for his noble behaviour to her erring brother. And so she told the truth: that she had loved him, and only him, all along.

"Cecil, my darling, what a long misery might have been spared me had I known this!"

Cecil looked down. Perhaps some might also have been spared to her. "It is not right that you should marry me now," she said.

"Why?"

"On account of this dreadful disgrace. George must have forgotten how it would fall upon——"

"Hush, Cecil! The disgrace, as I look upon it,—as I believe all just people must look upon it,—is confined to himself. It is, my darling. Not an iota of the respect due to Thomas by the world, of the consideration due

to the Miss Godolphins, will be abated. Rely upon it, I am right."

"But Thomas is being reflected upon daily,—personally abused."

"By a few inconsiderate creditors, smarting just now under their loss. That will all pass away. If you could read my heart and see how happy you have made me, you would know how little cause you have to talk of the 'disgrace,' Cecil."

She was happy also, as she rested there against him,—too happy.

"Would you like to live at Ashlydyat, Cecil? Thomas would rather we had it than that it should lapse to strangers. I should wish to buy it."

"Oh, yes—if it could be."

"I dare say it can. Of course it can. Ashlydyat must be sold, and I shall be as welcome a purchaser as any other would be. If it must be put up to auction, I can be the highest bidder, but I dare say they will be glad to save the expense of an auction, and let me purchase it by private contract. I might purchase the furniture also, Cecil; all the old relics, that Sir George set so much store by,—that Janet does still."

"If it could be!" she murmured.

"Indeed I think it may be. They will be glad to set a price upon it as it stands: look at the cost it will save. And, Cecil, we will drive away all the ghostly superstitions, and that ominous Shadow——"

Cecil lifted her face, an eager light upon it. "Janet says that the curse has been worked out with the ruin of the Godolphins: she thinks that the Dark Shadow will never come any more."

"So much the better. We will have the Dark Plain dug up and made into a children's playground, and a summer-house for them shall be erected on the very spot which the Shadow has made its own. There may be children here some time, Cecil."

Cecil's eyelashes were bent on her hot cheeks. She did not raise them.

"If you liked—if you liked, Cecil,

we might ask Janet and Bessy to retain their home," resumed Lord Averil, in his thoughtful consideration. "Ashlydyat is large enough."

"Their home is decided upon," said Cecil, shaking her head. "Bessy has promised to make hers at Lady Godolphin's Folly. Lady Godolphin exacted her promise to that effect, before she decided to return to it. I was to have gone also. Janet goes to Scotland. I am quite sure that this place has become too painful for Janet to remain in. She has an annuity, as perhaps you know; it was money left her by mamma's sister; so that she is independent, and can live where she pleases. But I am sure she will go to Scotland, as soon as,—as soon as——"

"I understand you, Cecil. As soon as Thomas shall have passed away."

The tears were glistening in her eyes. "Do you not see a great change in him?"

"A very great one. Cecil, I should like him to give you to me. Will you waive ceremony, and be mine at once?"

"At once?" she repeated, stammering and looking at him.

"I mean in the course of a week or two: as soon as you can make it convenient. Surely we have waited long enough!"

"I will see," murmured Cecil. "When a little of this bustle, this disgrace, shall have passed away. Let it die out first."

A grave expression arose to Lord Averil's face. "It must not be very long first, Cecil: if you would be mine while your brother is in life."

"I will, I will; it shall be as you wish," she answered, the tears falling from her eyes. And before Lord Averil could make any rejoinder, she had hastily quitted him, and was standing against the window, stealthily drying her wet cheeks: for the door had opened to give entrance to Thomas Godolphin.

CHAPTER LVI.

MY LADY WASHES HER HANDS.

THE summer was drawing towards its close; and so was the bankruptcy of Godolphin, Crosse and Godolphin. If we adhere to the style of the old firm, we only do as Prior's Ash did. Mr. Crosse, you have heard, was out of it actually and officially, but people, in speaking or writing of the firm, forgot to leave out his name. One or two maddened sufferers raised a question of his liability in their hopeless desperation; but they gained nothing by the motion: Mr. Crosse was as legally separated from the Godolphins as if he had never been connected with them. The labor, the confusion, and the doubt, attendant upon most bankruptcies, was nearly over, and creditors knew the best and the worst. The dividends would be, to use a common expression, shamefully small, when all was told: they might have been even smaller (not much, though) but that Lord Averil's claim on the sixteen thousand pounds, the value of the bonds, was not allowed to enter into it. Those bonds and all connected with them were sunk in silence so complete that at length some outsiders began to ask whether they and their reported loss had not been a myth altogether.

Thomas Godolphin had given up every thing, even to the watch in his pocket, the signet-ring upon his finger. The latter was returned to him. The jewelry of the Miss Godolphins was given up. Maria's jewelry was given up. In short, there was nothing that was not given up. The fortune of the Miss Godolphins, consisting of money and bank shares, was of course gone with the rest. The money had been in the bank at interest; the shares were now worthless. Janet alone had an annuity of about a hundred a year, which nothing could deprive her of: the rest of the Godolphins were reduced to beggary. Worse off were they than any of their clamorous creditors; since for them all

had gone,—houses, lands, money, furniture, personal belongings. But that Thomas Godolphin would not long be in a land where these things are required, it might have been a question how he was for the future to get sufficient of them to live.

The arrangement hinted at by Lord Averil had been carried out, and that nobleman was now the owner of Ashlydyat, and all that it contained. It may have been a little departing from the usual order of the law in such cases, to dispose of it by private arrangement; but it had been done with the full consent of all parties concerned. Even the creditors, who of course showed themselves ready to cavil at every thing, were glad that the cost of a public sale by auction should be avoided. A price had been put upon Ashlydyat, and Lord Averil gave it without a dissentient word; and the purchase of the furniture, as it stood, was undoubtedly advantageous to the sellers.

Yes, Ashlydyat had gone from the Godolphins. But Thomas and his sisters remained in it. There had been no battle with Thomas on the score of his remaining. Lord Averil had clasped his friend's hands within his own, and in a word or two of emotion had given him to understand that his chief satisfaction in its purchase had been the thought that he, Thomas, would remain in his own home, as long,—as long— Thomas Godolphin understood the broken words,—as long as he had need of one. "Nothing would induce me to enter upon my habitation in it until then," continued Lord Averil. "So be it," said Thomas, quietly, for he fully comprehended the feeling, and the gratification it brought to the conferrer of the obligation. "I shall not keep you out of it long, Averil." The same words, almost the same words that Sir George Godolphin had once spoken to his son: "I shall not keep you and Ethel long out of Ashlydyat."

So Thomas remained at Ashlydyat with his broken health, and the weeks

had gone on; and the summer was now drawing to an end, and more things beside it. Thomas Godolphin was beginning to be better understood than he had been at the time of the crash, and people were repenting of the cruel blame they had so freely hurled upon him. The early smart of the blow had faded away, and with it the prejudice which had unjustly, though not unnaturally, distorted their judgment, and buried for the time all kindly impulse. Perhaps there was not a single creditor, whatever might be the extent of the damage he had suffered by the bank, but would have stretched out his hand and given more gold, if by that means he could have saved the life of Thomas Godolphin. They learnt to remember that the fault had not lain with him; they believed that if by the sacrifice of his own life he could have averted the calamity he would have cheerfully sacrificed it; they knew that his days were as one long mourning, for them, individually,—and they took shame to themselves for having been so bitter against him, Thomas Godolphin.

Not so in regard to George. *He* did not regain his place in their estimation: and if they could have hoisted Mr. George on a pole in front of the bank and cast at him a few rotten eggs and other agreeable missiles, it had been a comforting relief to their spleen. Had George been condemned to stand at the bar of a public tribunal by the nobleman he had so defrauded, half Prior's Ash would have gone to recreate their feelings by staring at him during the trial, and made it into a day of jubilee. Harsh epithets, exceedingly unpleasant when taken personally, were freely lavished on him, and would be for a long while to come. *He had* wronged them: and time alone will suffice to wash the ever-present remembrance of such wrongs out.

He had been at Prior's Ash. Gay George still. So far as could be seen, the calamity had not much affected *him*. Not a line showed itself on his fair, smooth brow, not a shade less of

color on his bright cheek, not a gray thread in his luxuriant hair, not a cloud in his dark blue eye. Handsome, fascinating, attractive as ever was George Godolphin: and he really seemed to be as gay and light of temperament. When any ill-used creditor attacked him outright,—as some did, through a casual meeting in the street, or other lucky chance,—George was triumphant George still. Not a bit of shame did he seem to take to himself,—but so sunny, so fascinating was he, as he held the hands of the half-reluctant grumbler, and protested it should all come right sometime, that the enemy was won over to conciliation for the passing moment. It was impossible to help admiring George Godolphin; it was impossible, when brought face to face with him, not to be taken with his frank plausibility: the crustiest sufferer of them all was in a degree subdued by it. Prior's Ash understood that the officers of the bankruptcy "badgered" George a great deal when under his examinations, but George only seemed to come out of it the more triumphant. Safe on the score of Lord Averil, all the rest was in comparison light; and easy George never lost his good humor or his self-possession. He appeared to come scot-free out of every thing. Those falsified accounts in the bank books, that many another might have been held responsible and punished for, he emerged from harmless. It was conjectured that the full extent of these false entries never was discovered by the commissioners: Thomas Godolphin and Mr. Hurde alone could have told it: and Thomas preferred to let the odium of loosely-kept books, of reckless expenditure of money, fall upon himself, rather than betray George. Were the whole thing laid bare and declared, it could not bring a single fraction of benefit to the creditors, so, in that point of view, it was as well to let it rest. Are these careless, sanguine, gay-tempered men always lucky? It has been so asserted; and I do think there's a great deal of truth in it. Most unequivocal

cally lucky in this instance was George Godolphin.

It was of no earthly use asking him where all the money had gone,—to what use this sum had been put, to what use the other,—George could not tell. He could not tell any more than they could; he was as much perplexed over it as they were. He ran his white hand unconsciously through his shining golden hair, hopelessly trying his best to account for a great many items that nobody living could have accounted for. All in vain. Heedless, off-handed George Godolphin! He appeared before those inquisitive officials somewhat gayer in attire than was needful. A sober suit, rather of the seedy order, than bran new, might be deemed appropriate at such a time; but George Godolphin gave no indication of consulting any such rules of propriety. George Godolphin's refined good taste had kept him from falling into the loose and easy style of dress which some men so strangely favor in the present day, putting a gentleman in outward aspect on a level with the roughs of society. George, though no coxcomb, had been addicted to dress well and expensively; and George appeared inclined to do the same thing still. They could not take him to task on the score of his fine broadcloth, or of his neatly-finished boot; but they did bend their eyes meaningly on the massive gold chain which crossed his white waistcoat; on the costly appendages which dangled from it; on the handsome gold repeater which he more than once took out, as if weary of the passing hours. Mr. George received a gentle hint that those articles, however ornamental to himself, must be confiscated to the bankruptcy; and he resigned them with a good grace. The news of this little incident traveled abroad, as an interesting anecdote connected with the proceedings, and the next time George saw Charlotte Pain, she told him he was a fool to walk into the camp of the Philistines with pretty things about him. But George was not willfully dishonest (if

you can by any possibility understand that assertion, after what you know of his past doings), and he replied to Charlotte that it was only right the creditors should make spoil of his watch and any thing else he possessed. The truth, were it defined, being, that George was only dishonest when driven so to be. He had made free with the bonds of Lord Averil, but he could not be guilty of the meanness of hiding his personal trinkets.

Three or four times now had George been at Prior's Ash. People wondered why he did not remain,—what it was that took him again and again to London. The very instant he found that he could be dispensed with at Prior's Ash, away he flew; not to return to it again until imperatively demanded. The plain fact was that Mr. George did *not* like to face Prior's Ash. For all the easy self-possession, the gay good humor he displayed to its inhabitants, the place had become utterly distasteful to him, almost unbearable; he shunned it and hated it as a pious Roman Catholic hates and shuns purgatory. For that reason, and for no other, George did his best to escape from it.

He had seen Lord Averil. And his fair face had betrayed its shame as he said a few words of apology for what he had done—of thanks for the clemency shown him—of promises for the future. "If I live, I'll make it good to you," he murmured. "I did not think to *steal* them, Averil; I did not, on my solemn word of honor. I thought I should have replaced them before any thing could be known. Your asking for them immediately—that you should do so seemed like a fatality—upset every thing. But for that I might have weathered it all, and the house would not have gone. It was no light pressure that forced me to touch them. Heaven alone knows the need and the temptation."

And the meeting between the brothers? No eye saw it; no ear heard it. Good Thomas Godolphin was dying from the blow, dying be-

fore his time; but not a word of harsh reproach was thrown to George. How George defended himself—or whether he attempted to defend himself, or whether he let it wholly alone—the public never knew.

Lady Godolphin's Folly was no longer in the occupancy of the Ver-ralls or of Mrs. Pain: Lady Godolphin had returned to it. Not a day aged; not a day altered. Time flitted most lightly over Lady Godolphin. Her bloom-tinted complexion was delicately fresh as ever; her dress was as becoming, her flaxen locks were as youthful. She came with her servants and her carriages, and she took up her abode at the Folly, in all the splendor of the old days. Her income was large, and the misfortunes which had recently fallen on the family did not affect it. Lady Godolphin washed her hands of these misfortunes. She washed her hands of George. She told the world that she did so. She spoke of them openly to the public in general, to her acquaintance in particular in a slighting, contemptuous sort of manner, as we are all apt to speak of the ill-doings of other people. They don't concern us, and it's rather a condescension on our part to blame them at all. This was no concern of Lady Godolphin's. She told everybody it was not. George's disgrace did not reflect itself upon the family, and of him she—washed her hands. No: Lady Godolphin could not see that this break-up caused by George should be any reason whatever why she or the Miss Godolphins should hide their heads and go mourning in sackcloth and ashes. Many of her old acquaintances in the county agreed with Lady Godolphin in her view of things, and helped by their visits to make the Folly gay again.

To wash her hands of Mr. George was, equitably speaking, no more than gentleman deserved; but Lady Godolphin also washed her hands of Maria. On her return to Prior's Ash she had felt inclined to espouse

Maria's part,—to sympathize with and pity her; and she drove down in state one day and left her carriage with its powdered coachman and footman to pace to and fro before the bank while she went in. She openly avowed to Maria that she considered herself in a remote degree the cause which had led to her union with George Godolphin: she supposed that it was her having had Maria so much at the Folly, and afterwards on the visit at Broomhead, which had led to the attachment. As a matter of course she had regretted this, and wished there had been no marriage, now that George had turned out so gracelessly. If she could do any thing to repair it she would: and, as a first step, she offered the Folly as a present asylum to Maria. She would be safe there from worry, and—from George.

Maria scarcely at first understood. And when she did, her only answer was to thank Lady Godolphin, and to stand out, in her quiet, gentle manner, but untiringly and firmly, for her husband. Not a shade of blame would she acknowledge to be due to him; not a reverence would she render him the less. Her place was with him: she said, though the world turned against him. It vexed Lady Godolphin.

"Do you know," she asked, "that you must choose between your husband and the world?"

"In what way?" replied Maria.

"In what way! When a man acts in the manner that George Godolphin has acted, he puts a barrier between himself and society. But there's no necessity for the barrier to extend to you, Maria. If you will come to my house for a while, you will find this to be the case,—that it will not extend to you."

"You are very kind, Lady Godolphin. My husband is more to me than the world."

"Do you approve of what he has done?"

"No," replied Maria. "But it is not my place to show that I blame."

"I think it is," said Lady Godolphin, in the hard tone she used when her opinion was crossed.

Maria was silent. She never could contend with any one.

"Then you prefer to hold out against the world," resumed Lady Godolphin; "to put yourself beyond its pale! It is a bold step, Maria."

"What can I do?" was Maria's pleading answer. "If the world throws me over because I will not turn against my husband, I cannot help it. I married him for better and for worse, Lady Godolphin."

"The fact is, Maria," retorted my lady, sharply, "that you have loved George Godolphin in a ridiculous degree."

"Perhaps I have," was Maria's subdued answer, the color dyeing her face with various reminiscences. "But surely there was no sin in it, Lady Godolphin: he is my husband."

"And you cling to him still?"

"Oh yes."

Lady Godolphin rose. She shrugged her shoulders as she drew her white-lace shawl over them, she glanced at her coquettish blue bonnet in the pier-glass as she passed it, at her blush-rose cheeks. "You have chosen your husband, Maria, in preference to me,—in preference to the world; and from this moment I wash my hands of you, as I have already done of him."

It was all the farewell she took: and she went out to her carriage thinking what a blind, obstinate, hardened woman was Maria Godolphin. She saw not what it had cost that "hardened" woman to bear up before her; that her heart was nigh unto breaking; that the sorrow laid upon her was greater than she well knew how to battle with.

CHAPTER LVII.

A BROKEN IDOL.

GEORGE GODOLPHIN leaned against a pillar of the terrace opening from

the dining-room. They had not left the bank yet as a residence, but this was their last day in it. It was the last day they could stop in it, and why they should have lingered in it so long was food for gossip in Prior's Ash. On the morrow the house would be, as may be said, public property. Men would walk in and ticket all the things, apportioning them their place in the catalogue, their order in the days of sale, and the public would crowd in also, to feast their eyes upon the household gods hitherto sacred to George Godolphin.

How did he feel as he stood there? Was his spirit in heaviness, as was the case under similar misfortune of another man,—if the written record he left to us may be trusted,—that great and noble poet, ill-fated in death as in life, whose transcendent genius has since found no parallel.

It was a trying moment, that which found him, Standing alone beside his desolate hearth,
While all his household gods lay shivered round him.

Did George Godolphin find it trying? Was his hearth desolate? Not desolate in the full sense that that other spoke, for George Godolphin's wife was with him still.

She had stood by him. When he first returned to Prior's Ash, she had greeted him with her kind smile, with words of welcome. Whatever effect that unpleasant scandal, mentioned by Margery, which it seems had formed a staple dish for Prior's Ash, may have been taking upon her in secret and silence, she had given no sign of it to George. He never suspected that any such whisper, touching his worthy self, had been breathed to her. Mr. George best knew what grounds there might be for it: whether it bore any foundation, or whether it was but one of those breezy rumors, false as the wind, which have their rise in ill-nature, and in that alone: but however it may have been, whether true or false, he could not divine that such poison would be dropped into his wife's ear. If he had thought her greeting to him strange, her manner

more utterly subdued than there was need for, her grief of greater violence, he attributed it all to the recent misfortunes: and Maria made no other sign.

The effects had been bought in at Ashlydyat, but these had not: and this was the last day, almost the last hour of his occupancy of them. One would think his eyes would be cast around in lingering looks of regretful farewell—upon the chairs and tables, on the scattered ornaments, down to the rich carpets, up to the valuable and familiar pictures. Not a bit of it. George's eyes were bent on his nails which he was trimming to his satisfaction, and he was carolling in an undertone a strain of a new English opera.

They were to go out that evening. At dusk. At dusk you may be sure. They were to go forth from their luxurious home, and enter upon obscure lodgings, and go altogether down in the scale of what the world calls society. Not that the lodgings were so obscure, taking them in the abstract; obscure indeed, as compared with their home at the bank, very obscure beside the home they had sometime thought to remove to—Ashlydyat.

George could not be prudent: he could not, had his life depended on it, been *saving*. When the time approached that they might no longer stay in the bank, and Maria, in writing to him in London, reminded him of that fact, and asked where they were to go and what they were to do, George had returned for answer that there was no hurry, she might leave it all to him. But the next day brought him down; and he went out, off-hand, and engaged some fashionable rooms at three guineas a week. Maria was dismayed when she heard the price. How was it to be paid? George did not see precisely how, himself, just at present: but, to his sanguine disposition, the paying of ten guineas a week for lodgings would have looked quite easy. Maria had more forethought, and prevailed. The three-guinea-a-week rooms were given up, and some taken at half

the rent. She would have wished a lower rent still; but George laughed at her.

He stood there in his careless beauty, his bright face bent downwards, his tall, fine form, noble in its calmness. The sun was playing with his hair, bringing out its golden tints, and a smile illumined his face, as he went on with his song. Whatever may have been George Godolphin's shortcomings in some points of view, none could reproach him on the score of his personal attractions. All the old terror, the carking care, had gone out of him with the easy bankruptcy,—easy in its results to him, compared to what might have been,—and gay George, graceless George, was himself again. There may have been something deficient in his moral organization, for he really appeared to take no shame to himself for what had occurred. He stood there calmly self-possessed; the perfect gentleman, so far as looks and manners could make him one; looking as fit to bend his knee at the proud court of St. James's, as ever that stately gentleman his father had done, when her Majesty touched him with the flashing sword-blade and bid him rise up Sir George.

Once would my heart with the wildest emotion,
Throb, dearest Eily, when near me wert thou;
Now I regard thee with deep—

The strain was interrupted, and George, as he ceased it, glanced up. Meta, looking, it must be confessed, rather black about the hands and pinafore, as if Margery had not had time to attend to her within the last hour, came running in. George shut up his knife and held out his arms.

"Papa, are we to have tea at home, or after we get into the lodgings?"

"Ask mamma," responded George.

"Mamma told me to ask you. She doesn't know, she says. She's too busy to talk to me. She's getting the great box on to the stand."

"She's doing what?" cried George, in a quick accent.

"Getting the great box on to the stand," repeated Meta. "She's going

to pack it. Papa, will the lodgings be better than this? Will there be a big garden? Margery says there'll be no room for my rocking-horse. Won't there?"

Something in the child's questions may have grated on the fine ear of George Godolphin, had he stayed to listen to them. However lightly the bankruptcy might be passing over George's mind on his own score, he regretted its results most bitterly for his wife and child. To see them turned from their home, condemned to descend to the inconvenience and obscurity of these poor lodgings, was the worst pill George Godolphin had ever had to swallow. He would have cut off his right arm to retain them in their position; ay, and also his left: he could have struck himself down to the earth in his rage, for the disgrace he had brought on them.

Hastening up the stairs, he entered his bedroom. It was in a litter; boxes and wearing-apparel lying about. Maria, flushed and breathless, was making great efforts to drag a cumbrous trunk on a stand, or small bench, for the convenience of filling it. No very extensive efforts, either; for she knew that such might harm her at present in her feeble strength.

George raised the trunk to its place with one lift of his manly arms, and then forced his wife, with more gentleness, into a chair.

"How can you be so imprudent, Maria?" broke from him in a vexed tone, as he stood before her.

"I was not hurting myself," she answered. "The things must be packed."

"Of course they must. But not by you. Where's Margery?"

"Margery has a great deal to do. She cannot do it all."

"Then where's Sarah?" resumed George, crossly and sharply.

"Sarah's in the kitchen getting our dinner ready. We must have some to-day."

"Show me what the things are, and I will pack them."

"Nonsense! As if it would hurt me to put the things into the box!

You never interfered with me before, George."

"You never attempted this sort of work before. I won't have it, Maria. Were you in a fit state of health to be knocking about, you might do it; but you shall certainly not as it is."

It was his self-reproach that was causing his angry tone; very keenly at that moment was it making itself heard. And Maria's spirits were not that day equal to sharpness of speech. It told upon her, and she burst into tears.

How terribly the signs of distress vexed him, no words could tell. He took them as a tacit reproach to himself. And they were so: however unintentional on her part such reproach might be.

"Maria, I won't have this; I can't bear it," he cried, his voice hoarse with emotion. "If you show this temper, this childish sorrow before me, I shall run away."

He could have cut his tongue out for so speaking,—for his stinging words; for their stinging tone. "Temper! Childish sorrow!" George chafed at himself in his self-condemnation: he chafed—he knew how unjustly—at Maria.

Very, very unjustly. She had not annoyed him with reproaches, with complaints, as some wives would have done; she had not, to him, shown symptoms of the grief that was wearing out her heart. She had been all considerate to him, bearing up bravely whenever he was at Prior's Ash. Even now, as she dried away the rebellious tears, she would not let him think they were being shed for the lost happiness of the past, but murmured some feeble excuse about a headache.

He saw through the fond deceit; he saw all the generosity; and the red shame mantled in his fair face as he bent down to her, and his voice changed to one of the deepest tenderness.

"If I have lost you this home, Maria, I will get you another," he whispered. "Only give me a little

time. Don't grieve before me if you can help it, my darling: it is as though you ran a knife into my very soul. I can bear the loud abuse of the whole world, better than one silent reproach from you."

And the sweet words came to her as a precious balm. However bitter had been the shock of that one rude awaking, she loved him fondly still. It may be that she loved him only the more: for the passions of the human heart are wayward and willful, utterly unamenable to control.

Margery came into the room with her hands and arms full. George may have been glad of the divertisement, and he turned upon her, his voice resuming its anger. "What's the meaning of this, Margery? I come up here and I find your mistress packing and lugging boxes about. Can't you see to these things?"

Margery was as cross as George that day, and her answer in its sharpness might have rivalled his. Direct reproof Margery had never presumed to offer her master, though she would have liked to do it amazingly; for not a single condemner held a more exaggerated view of Mr. George's past delinquencies than she.

"I can't be in ten places at once. And I can't do the work of ten people. If you know them that can, sir, you'd better get 'em here in my place."

"Did I not ask you if you should want assistance in the packing, and you told me that you should not?" retorted George.

"No more I don't want it," was the answer. "I can do all the packing that is to do here, if I am let alone, and allowed to take my own time and do it in my own way. In all that chaffing and changing of houses when my Lady Godolphin chose to move Ashlydyat's things to the Folly, and when they had to be moved back afterwards in accordance with Sir George's will, who did the best part of the packing and saw to every thing, but me? It would be odd if I couldn't put up a few gowns and

shirts, but I must be talked to about help!"

Poor Margery was evidently in an explosive temper. Time back George would have put her down with a haughty word of authority or with joking mockery, as the humor might have taken him. He did not to-day. There had been wrong inflicted upon Margery; and it may be that he was feeling it. She had lost the poor savings of years,—the Brays had not allowed them to be great ones; she had lost the money bequeathed to her by Mrs. Godolphin. All had been in the bank, and all had gone. In addition to this, there were personal discomforts. Margery found the work of a common servant thrown upon her in her old age: an undergirl, Sarah, was her only help now at the bank, and Margery alone would follow their fallen fortunes to these lodgings.

"Do as you please," was all George said. "But your mistress shall not meddle with it."

"If my mistress chooses to set on and get to work behind my back, I can't stop it. She knows there's no need to do it. If you'll be so good, ma'am," turning to her mistress, "as just let things alone and leave 'em to me, you'll find they'll be done. What's a few bits of clothes to pack?" indignantly repeated Margery. "And there's nothing else that we may take. If I was to put up but a pair of sheets or a tin dish-cover, I should be called a thief, I suppose."

There lay the great grievance of Margery's present mood,—that all the things, save the "few bits of clothes," must be left behind. Margery, for all her crustiness and her out-spoken temper, was a most faithfully-attached servant, and it may be questioned if she did not feel the abandoning of their goods in a keener degree than did even Maria and George. The things were not hers: every article of her own, even to a silver cream-jug, which had been the boasted treasure of her life, she had been allowed to retain; even to the little work-box

of white satin-wood, with its landscape on the lid, the trees of which Miss Meta had been permitted to paint red, and the cottage blue. Not an article of Margery's but she could remove; all was sacred to her: but in her fidelity she did resent bitterly the having to leave the property of her master and mistress, the not being at liberty to pack up so much as a "tin dish-cover."

Maria, debarred from assisting, wandered in her restlessness through some of the more familiar rooms. It was well that she should pay them a farewell visit. From the bedroom where the packing was going on, to George's dressing-room, thence to her own sitting-room, thence to the drawing-room, all on that floor. She lingered in all. A home sanctified by years of happiness cannot be quitted without regret, even when exchanged at pleasure for another; but to turn out of it in humiliation, in poverty, in hopelessness, is a trial of the sharpest and sorest kind. Apart from the pain, the feeling was a strange one. The objects crowding these rooms; the necessary furniture, costly and substantial; the elegant ornaments of various shapes and sorts, the chaste works of art, not necessary but so luxurious and charming, had hitherto been their own, her's in conjunction with her husband's. They might have done what they pleased with them. Had she broken that Wedgewood vase, there was no one to call her to account for it; had she or George chosen to make a present of that rare basket in medallion, with its speaking likenesses of the beauties of the whilom gay French court, there was nobody to say them nay; had they felt disposed to change that fine piano for a different one, the liberty to do so was theirs. They had been the owners of these surroundings, the master and mistress of the house and its contents. And now? Not a sole article belonged to them: they were but tenants on sufferance: the things remained, but their right in them had passed away. If she dropped and

broke only that pretty trifle which her hand was touching now, she must answer for the mishap. The feeling, I say, was a strange one.

She walked through the rooms with a dry eye and hot brow. Tears seemed long ago to have gone away from her. It is true she had been surprised into a few that day, but the lapse was unusual. Why should she make this farewell to the rooms? she began asking herself. She needed it not to remember them. Visions of the past came crowding upon her memory; of this or the other happy day spent in them; of the gay meetings when they had received the world, of the sweet home-hours when she had sat there alone with him of whom she had well-nigh made an idol,—her husband. Mistaken idolatry, Mrs. George Godolphin! mistaken, useless, vain idolatry. Was there ever an earthly idol yet that did not mock its worshiper? I know of none. We make an idol of our child, and the time comes when it will turn round to sting us; we make an idol of the god or goddess of our passionate love,—and how does it end?

Maria sat down and leaned her head upon her hand, thinking more of the past than of the future. She was getting to have less hope in the future than was good for her: it is a bad sign when a sort of apathy with regard to it steals over us; a proof that the mind is not in the healthy state that it ought to be. A time of trial, of danger, was approaching for Maria, and she seemed to contemplate the possibility of her sinking under it with strange calmness. A few months back, the bare glance at such a fear would have unhinged her: she would have clung to her husband and Meta, and sobbed out her passionate prayer to God in her dire distress, not to be taken from them. Things had changed: the world in which she had been so happy had lost its charm for her; the idol in whose arms she had sheltered herself turned out not to have been of pure gold; and Maria Godolphin began to realize the forcible truths of the

words of the wise King of Jerusalem,—that the world and its dearest hopes are but vanity.

CHAPTER LVIII.

MRS. PAIN TAKING LEAVE.

MRS. CHARLOTTE PAIN, in her looped-up petticoats and nicely-fitting kid boots, was tripping jauntily through the streets of Prior's Ash. Mrs. Pain had been somewhat vacillating in regard to her departure from that long-familiar town; she had reconsidered her determination of quitting it so abruptly; and on the day she went out of Lady Godolphin's Folly, she entered on some stylish lodgings in the heart of Prior's Ash. Only for a week or two; just to give her time to take proper leave of her friends, she said: but the weeks had gone on and on, and Charlotte was there yet.

Society had been glad to keep Charlotte. Society, of course, shuts its lofty ears to the ill-natured tales spread by low-bred people: that is, when it finds it convenient to do so. Society had been pleased to be deaf to any little obscure tit-bits of scandal which had made vulgarly free with Charlotte's name: and as to the vague rumors connecting Mr. Verrall with George Godolphin's ruin, nobody knew whether that was not pure scandal, too. But if not, why—Mrs. Pain could not be justly reflected on for the faults of Mr. Verrall. So Charlotte was as popular and dashing in her hired rooms as she had been at Lady Godolphin's Folly, and she had remained in them until now.

But now she was really going. This was the last day of her sojourn at Prior's Ash, and Charlotte was walking about unceremoniously, bestowing her farewells on anybody who would receive them. It almost seemed as if she had only waited to witness the removal from the bank of Mr. and Mrs. George Godolphin.

She walked along in exuberant spirits, nodding her head to everybody: up at windows, in at doorways, to poor people on foot, to rich ones in carriages; her good-natured smile was everywhere. She rushed into shops, and chatted familiarly, and won the shopkeepers' hearts by asking if they were not sorry to lose her. She was turning out of one, when she came pop on the rector of All Souls'. Charlotte's petticoats went down in a swimming reverence.

"I am paying my farewell visits, Mr. Hastings. Prior's Ash will be rid of me to-morrow."

Not an answering smile crossed the rector's face: it was cold, impassive, haughtily civil: almost as if he were thinking that Prior's Ash might have been none the worse had it been rid of Mrs. Charlotte Pain before.

"How is Mrs. Hastings to-day?" asked Charlotte.

"She is not well."

"No! I must try and get a minute to call in on her. Adieu for the present. I shall see you again, I hope."

Down sunk the skirts once more, and the rector lifted his hat in silence. In the ultra-politeness, in the spice of sauciness gleaming out from her flashing eyes, the rector read incipient defiance. But if Mrs. Pain feared that he might be intending to favor her with a little public clerical censure, she was entirely mistaken. The rector washed his hands of Mrs. Pain, as Lady Godolphin did of her step-son, Mr. George. He walked on, condemnation and scorn lighting his face.

Charlotte walked on, and burst into a laugh as she did so. "Was he afraid to forbid my calling at the rectory?" she asked herself. "He would have liked to, I know. I'll go there now."

She was not long reaching it. But Isaac was the only one of the family she got to see. He came to her, charged with Mrs. Hastings's compliments,—she felt unequal to seeing Mrs. Pain.

"What's the matter with her?" inquired Charlotte, suspecting the validity of the excuse.

"She is never very well now," was the somewhat-evasive answer: and Isaac, though civilly courteous, was as cold as his father. "When do you say you leave us, Mrs. Pain?"

"To-morrow morning. And you? I heard you were going to London. You have found some situation there, George Godolphin told me."

Isaac threw his eyes—they were just like the rector's—straight and full into her face. Charlotte's were dancing with a variety of expressions, but the chief one was good-humored mischief."

"I am going into a bank in Lombard Street. Mr. Godolphin got me in."

"You won't like it," said Charlotte.

"I dare say not. But I think myself lucky to get it."

"There'll be one advantage," continued Charlotte, good-naturedly,— "that you can come and see us. You know Mrs. Verrall's address. Come as often as you can; every Sunday, if you like; any week-day evening: I'll promise you a welcome beforehand."

"You are very kind," briefly returned Isaac. They were walking slowly to the gate, and he held it open for her.

"What's Reginald doing?" she asked. "Have you heard from him lately?"

"Not very lately. You are aware that he is in London under a master of navigation, preparatory to passing for second officer. As soon as he has passed, he will be going to sea again."

"When you write to him, give him our address, and tell him to come and see me. And now good-by," added Charlotte, heartily. "And mind you don't show yourself a muff, Mr. Isaac, but come and see us. Do you hear?"

"I hear," said Isaac, smiling, as he

thawed to her good humor. I wish you a pleasant journey, Mrs. Pain."

"Merci bien. If—I say, is that Grace?"

Charlotte had cast her eyes to the rector's upper windows. Mrs. Ake-man, her baby in her arms,—a great baby, getting now,—stood at one.

"She is spending the afternoon with us," explained Isaac.

"And wouldn't come down to me," retorted Charlotte. "She's very polite. Tell her so from me, Isaac. Good-by."

The church-clock boomed out five as Charlotte passed it, and she came to a stand-still of consideration. It was the hour at which she had ordered her dinner to be ready.

"Bother dinner!" decided she. "I can't go home for that. I want to go and see if they are in their lodgings yet. Is that you, Mrs. Bond?"

Sure enough, Mrs. Bond had come into view, and was halting to bob down to Charlotte. Her face looked pale and pinched. There had been no supply of strong waters to-day.

"I be a'most starving ma'am," said she. "I be a waiting here to catch the parson, for I've been to his house, and they says he's out. I dun know as it's of any good seeing of him, either. 'Taint much as he have got to give away now."

"I am about to leave, Mrs. Bond," cried Charlotte, in her free and communicative humor.

"More's the ill-luck, and I have heered on't," responded Mrs. Bond. "Everybody as is good to us poor goes away, or dies, or fails, or sum'at. There'll be soon naught left for us but the work'us. Many's the odd bit o' silver you have give me at times, ma'am."

"So I have," said Charlotte, laughing. "What if I were to give you this, as a farewell remembrance?"

She took a half-sovereign out of her purse and held it up. Mrs. Bond gasped: the luck seemed too great to be realized.

"Here, you may have it," said

Charlotte, dropping it into the shaking and dirty hand held out. "But you know you are nothing but an old sinner, Mrs. Bond."

"I knows I be," humbly acquiesced Mrs. Bond. "'Tain't of no good denying of it to you, ma'am: you be up to things."

Charlotte laughed. "You'll go and change this at the nearest gin-shop, and you'll reel into bed to-night, blind-fold. That's the only good you'll do with it. There! don't say I quitted Prior's Ash, forgetting you."

She walked on rapidly, leaving Mrs. Bond in her ecstasy of delight to waste her thanks on the empty air. The lodgings George had taken were at the opposite end of the town, nearer to Ashlydyat, and to them Charlotte was bound. They were not on the high-road, but in a quiet side lane. The house, low and commodious, and built in the cottage style, stood in the midst of a productive garden. A small grass-plot and some flowers were before the front windows, but the rest of the ground was filled with fruit and vegetables. Charlotte opened the green gate and walked up the path, which led direct to the house.

The front-door was open to a small hall, and Charlotte went in, finding her way, and turned to a room on the left,—a cheerful, good-sized, old-fashioned parlor, with a green carpet, and pink flowers on its walls. There stood Margery, laying out some teacups and some bread-and-butter. Her eyes opened at the sight of Mrs. Pain.

"Are they come yet, Margery?"

"No," was Margery's short answer. "They'll be here in half an hour, maybe; and that'll be before I want 'em,—with all the rooms and every thing to see to, and only me to do it."

"Is that all you are going to give them for tea?" cried Charlotte looking contemptuously on the bread-and-butter. "I should surprise them with a little dainty dish or two on the table. It would look cheering: and they might soon be cooked."

"I dare say they might, where

there's conveniences and time," wrathfully returned Margery, who relished Mrs. Pain's interference as little as she relished her presence. "The kitchen we are to have is about as big as a rat-hole, and my hands are full enough this evening without dancing out to buy meats, and trying if the grate'll cook 'em."

"Of course you will light the fire here," said Charlotte, turning to the grate. "I see it is laid."

"It is not cold," grunted Margery.

"But the fire will be like a pleasant welcome. I'll do it myself."

She caught up a box of matches which stood on the mantelpiece, and set fire to the fagots underneath the coal. Margery took no notice one way or the other. The fire in a fair way of burning, Charlotte hastened from the house, and Margery breathed freely again.

Not for long. A short space and Charlotte was back again, accompanied by sundry parcels. There was a renowned comestible shop in Prior's Ash, and Charlotte had been ransacking it. She had also been home for a small parcel on her own account: but that did not contain eatables.

Taking off her cloak and bonnet, she made herself at home. Critically surveying the bedrooms; visiting the kitchen to see that the kettle boiled; lighting the lamp on the tea-table, for it was dark then; demanding an unlimited supply of plates, and driving Margery nearly wild with her audacity. But Charlotte was doing it all in good feeling, in her desire to render this new asylum bright-looking at the moment of their taking possession of it; to cheat the first entrance of some of its bitterness for Maria. Whatever may have been Mrs. Charlotte Pain's faults,—and Margery, for one, gave her credit for plenty,—she was capable of generous impulses. It is probable that in the days gone by, a feeling of jealousy, of spite, had rankled in her heart against George Godolphin's wife; but that had worn itself out,—had been finally lost in the sorrow felt for Maria since the misfortunes had fallen.

When the fly drove up to the door, and George brought in his wife and Meta, the bright room, the well-laden tea-table greeted their surprised eyes, and Charlotte was advancing with open hands.

"I thought you'd like to see somebody here to get things comfortable for you, and I knew that cross-grained Margery would have enough to do between the boxes and her temper," she cried, taking Maria's hands. "How are you, Mr. George?"

George found his tongue. "This is kind of you, Mrs. Pain."

Maria felt that it was kind: and in her tide of gratitude, as her hand lay in Charlotte's warm grasp, she almost forgot that cruel calumny. Not quite: it could not quite be forgotten, even momentarily, until earth and its passions should have passed away.

"And mademoiselle?" continued Charlotte. Mademoiselle, little gourmande that she was, raised on her toes, surveying the table with curious eyes. Charlotte lifted her in her arms, and held up to her view a glass jar, something inside it the color of pale amber. "This is for good children, this is."

"That's me," responded Meta, smacking her lips. "What is it?"

"It's,—let me read the label,—it's pine-apple jelly. And that's boned fowl; and that's *gélatine de veau*; and that's *pâté de lapereau aux truffes*,—if you understand what it all means, *petite marmotte*. And—there—you can look at every thing and find out for yourself," concluded Charlotte. "I am going to show mamma her bedroom."

It opened from the sitting-room,—a commodious arrangement, as Charlotte observed, in case of illness. Maria cast her eyes round it, and saw a sufficiently comfortable chamber. It was not their old luxurious chamber at the bank: but luxuries and they must part company now.

"Look here," said Charlotte, dropping her voice to a whisper.

She was pointing with her finger to the chest of drawers. Placed back,

the only object on its white covering was the miniature red trunk which Maria had given into her charge in the summer.

"Oh, thank you!—thank you greatly for taking care of it, Mrs. Pain."

"It is safe here now. You and the enemy have parted company. Though it were heaped full of diamonds, they'd not come and look after them here. Is it?"

"What? Full of diamonds?" Maria shook her head. "Indeed, I told you truth, Mrs. Pain, when I said there was nothing in it of value. It contains but a few letters and papers, and a lock or two of my dead children's hair."

"In-deed!" exclaimed Charlotte, with a sweetly innocent look. "Then you and I are different, Mrs. George Godolphin. Were the like calamity to happen to my husband—if I had one—I should consider it a praiseworthy virtue to save all I could from the grasp of the spoilers. Come along. We shall have Meta going into all the good things."

Charlotte reigned at the head of the table that night, triumphantly gay. Margery waited with a stiffened neck and pursed-up lips. Nothing more; there were no other signs of rebellion. Margery had had her say out with that one memorable communication, and from thenceforth her lips were closed forever. Did the woman repent of having spoken?—did she now think it better to have let doubt be doubt? It is hard to say. She had made no further objection to Mrs. Pain in words; she intended to make none. If that lady filled Miss Meta to bursting to-night with the pine-apple jelly and the boned fowl, and the other things with unpronounceable names, which Margery regarded as rank poison when regaling Miss Meta, she should not interfere. The sin might lie on her master and mistress's head.

It was close upon ten when Charlotte rose to go. She put on her things, and bent over Maria in greeting. "Take care of yourself, Mrs.

George," she said, in a kindly tone. "Now that the worst is over, things will soon come round again. And if you should find it convenient to get rid of Meta for a bit, send her up to me. I'll take great care of her."

Margery stood with the door open. George was taking down his hat.

"I protest and declare you shall not, Mr. George Godolphin!" exclaimed Charlotte, divining his intention of seeing her home. "Do you suppose I am going to take you from your wife, the first evening she is in this strange place?"

"Do you suppose I am going to let you be run away with in the dangerous streets of Prior's Ash?" returned George, with laughing gallantry.

"I'll guard against that," returned Charlotte. "I am old enough to take care of myself."

"Why, I should not be away ten minutes."

"Now, you know when I say a thing, I mean it," said Charlotte, in a peremptory tone. "You are not going with me, Mr. George. I have a reason for wishing to go home by myself. There."

George could only yield. Charlotte had spoken still in her kindness to Maria. In spite of her own attractive presence, Maria's spirits were lower than they might have been: and Charlotte generously left her the society of her husband. As to walking through the streets of Prior's Ash alone, or through any other streets, Charlotte had no foolish fears, but would as soon go through them by night as by day.

As a proof of this, she did not proceed direct homewards, but turned up a road that led to the railway. She had no objection to a stroll that moonlight-night, and she had a fancy for seeing what passengers the ten-o'clock train brought, which was just in.

It brought none,—none that Charlotte could see: and she was preparing to turn back on the dull road, when a solitary figure came looming on her sight in the distance. He was

better than nobody, regarding him in Charlotte's social point of view: but he appeared to be advanced in years. She could see so much before he came up.

Charlotte strolled on, gratifying her curiosity by a good stare. A tall, portly man, with a fresh color and snow-white hair. She was passing by him, when he lifted his face, which had been bent, and turned it towards her. The recognition was mutual, and she darted up to him, and gave his hand a hearty shake. It was Mr. Crosse.

"Good gracious me! We all thought you never meant to come back again!"

"And I'd rather not have come back, Mrs. Pain, than come to hear what I am obliged to hear. I went streaming off for weeks from Pau, where I was staying, a confounded, senseless tour into Spain, leaving no orders for letters to be sent to me, and so I heard nothing. What has brought about this awful calamity?"

"What calamity?" asked Charlotte,—knowing perfectly well all the while.

"What calamity!" repeated Mr. Crosse, who was rapid in speech and hot in temper. "The failure of the bank,—the Godolphins' ruin. What else?"

"Oh, that!" slightly returned Charlotte. "That's stale news now. Folks are forgetting it. Queen Anne's dead."

"What brought it about?" reiterated Mr. Crosse, neither the words nor their tone pleasing him.

"What does bring such things about?" rejoined Charlotte. "Want of money, I suppose,—or bad management."

"But there was no want of money; there was no bad management in the Godolphins' house," raved Mr. Crosse, becoming excited. "I wish you'd not play with my feelings, Mrs. Pain."

"Who is playing with them?" cried Charlotte. "If it was not want of money, if it was not bad management, I don't know what else it was."

"I was told in London, as I came

through it, that George Godolphin has been playing up old Rosemary with every thing, and that Verrall has helped him," continued Mr. Crosse.

"Folks will talk," said bold Charlotte. "I was told—it was the current report in Prior's Ash—that the stoppage had occurred through Mr. Crosse drawing his money out of the concern."

"What an unfounded assertion!" exclaimed that gentleman, in choler. "Prior's Ash ought to have known better."

"So ought those who tell you rubbish about George Godolphin and Verrall," coolly affirmed Charlotte.

"Where's Thomas Godolphin?"

"At Ashlydyat. He's in luck. My Lord Averil has bought it all in as it stands, and Mr. Godolphin remains in it."

"He is ill, I hear?"

"Pretty near dead, I hear," retorted Charlotte. "My lord is to marry Miss Cecilia."

"And where's that wicked George?"

"If you call names, I won't answer you another word, Mr. Crosse."

"I suppose *you* don't like to hear it," he returned in so pointed a manner that Charlotte might have felt it as a lance-shaft. "Well, where is he?"

"Just gone into lodgings with his wife and Margery and Meta. I have been taking tea with them. They left the bank to-day."

Mr. Crosse stood, nodding his head in the moonlight, and communing aloud with himself. "And, so—and so—it is all a smash together! It is as bad as was said."

"It couldn't be worse," cried Charlotte. "Prior's Ash won't hold up its head for many a day. It's no longer worth living in. I leave it for good to-morrow."

"Poor Sir George! It's a good thing he was in his grave. Lord Averil could have prosecuted George, I hear."

"Were I to hear to-morrow that I could be prosecuted for standing here and talking to you to-night, I shouldn't wonder," was the answer.

"What on earth did he do with the money? What went with it?"

"Report runs that he founded a cluster of almshouses with it," said Charlotte, demurely. "Ten old women, who are to be found in coats and red cloaks, and half-a-crown a week."

The words angered him beyond every thing. Nothing could have been more serious than his mood,—nothing could savor of levity, of mockery, more than hers. "Report runs that he has been giving fabulous prices for horses to make presents of," angrily retorted Mr. Crosse, in a tone of pointed significance.

"Not a bit of it," returned undaunted Charlotte. "He only gave bills."

"Good-night to you, Mrs. Pain," came the next words, haughty and abruptly; and Mr. Crosse turned to continue his way.

Leaving Charlotte standing there. No other passengers came down from the station: there were none to come: and she turned to retrace her steps to the town. She walked slowly and moved her head from side to side, as if she would take in all the familiar features of the landscape by way of a farewell in anticipation of the morrow,—which was to close her residence at Prior's Ash forever.

CHAPTER LIX.

MR. REGINALD MAKES A MORNING CALL.

TIME elapsed. Autumn weather had come; and things were going on in their state of progression at Prior's Ash, as things always must go on. Be it slow or fast, be it marked or unmarked, the stream of life must glide forward; onwards, onwards; never stopping, never turning from its appointed course that bears straight towards eternity.

In the events that concern us nothing had been very marked. At least, not outwardly. There were no startling changes to be recorded,—unless,

indeed, it was that noted change in the heart of the town. The bank of which you have heard so much was no more; but in its stead flourished an extensive ironmongery establishment,—which it was to be hoped would not come to the same ignoble end. The house had been divided into two dwellings: the one, accessible by the former private entrance, was let to a quiet widow lady and her son, a young man reading for the church; the other had been opened in all the grandeur and glory of highly-polished steel and iron. Grates, chimney-pieces, fire-irons, fenders, scrapers, gilded lamps, ornamental gratings, and other useful things more puzzling to mention, crowded the front windows and dazzled the admiring eyes of the passers-by. You might have thought it was gold and silver displayed there, when the sun reflected its light on the shining wares and brought out their brilliancy. Not one of the Godolphins could pass it without a keen heart-pang, but the general public were content to congregate and admire, as long as the novelty lasted.

The great crash, which had so upset the equanimity of Prior's Ash, was beginning to be forgotten as a thing of the past. The bankruptcy was at an end,—save for some remaining proceedings of form which did not concern the general public, and not much the creditors. Compassion for those who had been injured by the calamity was dying out: many a home had been rendered needy, many desolate; but outside people do not make these uncomfortable facts any lasting concern of theirs. There were only two who did make them so, in regard to Prior's Ash: and they would make them so as long as their lives should last.

George Godolphin's wife was lying in her poor lodgings, and Thomas was dying at Ashlydyat,—dying so slowly and imperceptibly that the passage to the grave was smoothed, and the town began to say that he might recover yet. The wrong inflicted upon others,

however unwillingly on his own part, the distress rife in many a house around, was ever present to him. It was ever present to Maria. Some of those who had lost were able to bear it; but there were others upon whom it had brought privation, poverty, utter ruin. It was for these last that the sting was felt.

A little boy had been born to Maria, and had died at the end of a few days. He was baptized Thomas. "Name him Thomas: it will be a remembrance of my brother," George Godolphin had said. But the young Thomas died before the elder one. The same disorder which had taken off two of Maria's other infants took off him,—convulsions. "Best that it should be so," said Maria, with closed eyes and folded hands.

Somehow she could not get strong again. Lying in bed, sick and weak, she had time to ruminate upon the misfortunes which had befallen them: the bitter, hopeless reminiscence of the past, the trouble and care of the present, the uncertainty of the future. To dwell upon such themes is not good for the strongest frame; but for the weak it may be worse than can be expressed. Whether it was that, or whether it was a tendency to keep sick, which might have arisen without any mental trouble at all, Maria did not get strong. Mr. Snow sent her no end of tonics; he ordered her all kinds of renovating dainties; he sat and chatted and joked with her by the half-hour together: and it availed not. She was about again, as the saying runs, but she remained lamentably weak. "You don't make an effort to arouse yourself," Mr. Snow would say, thumping his stick in displeasure upon the floor as he spoke. Well, perhaps she did not: the plain fact was, that there was neither the health nor the spirit within her to make the effort.

Circumstances were cruelly against her. She might have battled with the bankruptcy; with the shock and the disgrace; she might have battled with the discomforts of their fallen

position, with the painful consciousness of the distress cast into many a home, with the humiliation dealt out to herself as her own special portion, by the pious pharisees around; she might have battled with the vague prospects of the future, hopeless though they looked: women equally sensitive, good, refined as Maria, have had to contend with all this, and have survived it. But what Maria could not battle with,—what had told upon her heart and her spirit worse than all the rest,—was that dreadful shock touching her husband. She had loved him passionately; she had trusted him wholly; in her blind faith she had never cast so much as a thought to the possibility that he could be untrue to his allegiance: and she had been obliged to learn that—infidelity forms part of a man's frail nature. It had dashed to the ground the faith and love of years; it had outraged every feeling of her heart; it seemed to have destroyed her trust in all mankind. Implicit faith! pure love! trust that she had deemed stronger than death!—all had been rent in one moment, and the shock had been greater than was her strength to endure. It was as when one cuts a cord asunder. Any thing, any thing but this! She could have borne with George in his crime and disgrace, and clung to him all the more because the world shunned him; had he been sent out to Van Dieman's Land the felon that he might have been, she could have crept by his side and loved him still. But this was different. To a woman of refined feelings, as was Maria, loving trustingly, it was as the very sharpest point of agony. It must be such. She had reposed calmly in the belief that she was all in all to him: and she awoke to find that she was no more to him than were others. They had lived, as she fondly thought, in a world of their own, a world of tenderness, of love, of unity; she and he alone; and now she learnt that his world at least had not been so exclusive. Apart from more sacred feelings that were out-

raged, it brought to her most bitter humiliation. She seemed to have sunk down to a level she scarcely knew with what. It was not the broad and bare infidelity: at that a gentlewoman scarcely likes to glance; but it was the fading away of all the purity and romance which had enshrined them round, as with a halo, they alone, apart from the world. In one unexpected moment, as a flash of lightning will blast a forest tree and strip it of its foliage, leaving it bare, withered, helpless, so had that blow rent the heart's life of Maria Godolphin. And she did not get strong.

Yes. Thomas Godolphin was dying at Ashlydyat, Maria was breaking her heart in her lonely lodgings, Prior's Ash was suffering in its homes; but where was the cause of it all,—Mr. George? Mr. George was in London. Looking after something to do, he told Maria. Probably he was. He knew that he had his wife and child upon his hands, and that something must be done, and speedily, or the wolf would come to the door. Lord Averil, good and forgiving as was Thomas Godolphin, had promised George to try and get him some post abroad; for George had confessed to him that he did not care to remain in England. But the prospect was a remote one at best; and it was necessary that George should be exerting himself while it came. So he was in town looking after the something, and meanwhile not by any means breaking his heart in regrets, or living like an anchorite up in a garret. Maria heard from him, and of him. Once a week, at least, he wrote to her—sometimes oftener—affectionate and gay letters. Loving words to herself, kisses and stories for Meta, teasings and jokes for Margery. He was friendly with the Verrall's—which Prior's Ash wondered at; and would now and then be seen riding in the Park with Mrs. Charlotte Pain—the gossip of which was only chronicled to Maria by her gossiping acquaintance. Maria was silent on the one subject, but she did write

a word of remonstrance to him about his friendship with Mr. Verrall. It was scarcely seemly, she intimated, after what people had said. George wrote her word back that she knew nothing about it; that people had taken up a false notion altogether. Verrall was a good fellow at heart; what had happened was not his fault, but the fault of certain men with whom he, Verrall, had been connected; and that Verrall was showing himself a good friend now, and he did not know what he should do without him.

"A warm bright day like this, and I find you moping and stewing on that sofa! I'll tell you what it is, Mrs. George Godolphin, you are trying to make yourself into a chronic invalid."

Mr. Snow's voice, in its serio-comic accent, might be heard at the top of the house as he spoke. It was his way.

"I am better than I was," answered Maria. "I shall get well some time."

"Some time! It's to be hoped you will. But you are doing nothing much yourself towards it. Have the French left you a cloak and bonnet, pray?"

Maria smiled at his joke. She knew he alluded to the bankruptcy commissioners. When Mr. Snow was a boy the English and French were at war, and he generally used the word French in a jesting way to designate enemies.

"They left me all," she said.

"Then be so good as to put them on. I don't terminate this visit until I have seen you out of doors."

To contend would be more trouble than to obey. She wrapped herself up and went out with Mr. Snow. Her steps were almost too feeble to walk alone.

"See the lovely day it is! And you, an invalid, suffering from nothing but dumps, not to be out in it! It's nearly as warm as September. Halloa, young lady! are you planting cabbages!"

They had turned an angle and come upon Miss Meta. She was digging away with a child's spade, scattering the mould over the path; her woollen shawl, put on for warmth, turned hind before, and her hat fallen back with the ardor of her labors. David Jekyl, who was digging to purpose close by, was grumbling at the scattered mould on his clean paths.

"I'll sweep it up, David; I'll sweep it up," the young lady said.

"Fine sweeping it 'ud be!" grunted David.

"I declare it's as warm as summer in this path!" cried Mr. Snow. "Now mind, Mrs. George, you shall stop here for half an hour; and if you get tired there's a bench to sit upon. Little damsel, if mamma goes in-doors, you tell me the next time I come. She is to stay out."

"I'll not tell of mamma," said Meta, throwing down her spade and turning her earnest eyes, her rosy cheeks, full on Mr. Snow.

He laughed as he walked away. "You are to stay out for the half-hour, mind you, Mrs. George. I insist upon it."

Direct disobedience would not have been expedient, if only in the light of example to Meta; but Maria had rather been out on any other day, or been ordered to any other path. This was the first time she had seen David Jekyl since the bank had failed, and his father's loss was very present to her.

"How are you, David?" she inquired.

"I be among the middlin's," shortly answered David.

"And your father! I heard he was ill?"

"So he is ill. He couldn't be worser."

"I suppose the coming winter is against him?"

"There be other things again him as well as the coming winter," returned David. "Fretting, for one."

Ah, how bitter it all was! But David did not mean to allude in any

offensive manner to the past, or to hurt the feelings of George Godolphin's wife. It was his crusty way.

"Is Jonathan better?" she asked.

"He ain't of much account, he ain't, since he got that hurt," was David's answer. "A doing about three days' work in a week! It's to be hoped times 'll mend."

Maria walked slowly to and fro in the sunny path, saying a word or two to David now and then, but choosing safer subjects; the weather, the flowers under his charge, the vegetables already nipped with frost. She looked very ill. Her face thin and white, her soft sweet eyes larger and darker than was natural. Her hands were wrapped in the cloak for warmth, and her steps were unequal. Crusty David actually ventured on a little bit of civility.

"You don't seem to get about over quick, ma'am."

"Not very, David. But I feel better than I did."

She sat down on the bench, and Meta came flying to her, spade in hand. Might she plant a gooseberry-tree, and have all the gooseberries off it next year for herself?

Maria stroked the child's hair from her flushed face as she answered. Meta flew off to find the "tree," and Maria sat on, plunged in a train of thought which the question had led to. Where should they be at the gooseberry season next year? In that same dwelling? Would George's prospects have become more certain then?

"Now then! Is that the way you dig?"

The sharp words came from Margery, who had looked out at the kitchen window and caught sight of Miss Meta rolling in the mould. The child jumped up laughing, and ran into the house for her skipping-rope.

"Have I been out half an hour, do you think, David?" Maria asked, by-and-by.

"Near upon 't," said David, without lifting his back or his eyes.

She rose to pursue her way slowly

in-doors. She was so fatigued—and there had been, to say, no exertion—that she felt as if she could never stir out again. The mere putting on and taking off her cloak was almost beyond her. She let it fall from her shoulders, put off her bonnet, and sank down in an easy-chair.

From this she was aroused by hearing the garden-gate hastily open. Quick footsteps came up the path, and a manly voice said something to David Jekyl in a free, joking tone. She bounded up, her cheek flushing to hectic, her heart beating. Could it be George?

No, it was her brother, Reginald Hastings. He came in with a great deal of unnecessary noise and clatter. He had arrived from London only that morning, he proceeded to tell Maria, and was going up again by the night-train.

"I say, Maria, how ill you look!"

Very ill indeed just then. The excitement of sudden expectation had faded away, leaving her whiter than before. Dark circles were round her eyes, and her delicate hands, more feeble, more slender than of yore, moved restlessly on her lap.

"I have been very feverish the last few weeks," she said. "I think I am stronger. But I have been out for a walk and am tired."

"What did the little shaver die of?" asked Reginald.

"Of convulsions," she answered, her bodily weariness too great to speak in any thing but a tone of apathy. "Why are you going up again so soon? Have you got a ship?"

Reginald nodded. "We have orders to join to-morrow at twelve. She's the *Mary*, bound for China, six hundred tons. I knew mother would never forgive me if I didn't come down to say good-by, so I thought I'd have two nights of it in the train."

"Are you going second officer, Reginald?"

"Second officer!—no. I have not passed."

"Regy!"

"They are a confounded lot, that

board!" broke out Mr. Reginald in an explosive tone. "I don't believe they know their own business,—and as to passing any one without once turning him, they won't do it. I should like to know who has the money! You pay your guinea, and you don't pass. Come up again next Monday, they say. Well, you do go up again, as you want to pass; and you pay another half-guinea. I did; and they turned me again; said I didn't know seamanship. The great owls! not know seamanship! I! They took me, I expect, for one of those dainty middies in Green's service who walk the deck in kid gloves all day. If there's one thing I have at my fingers' ends it is seamanship. I could navigate a vessel all over the world—and be hanged to the idiots! You can come again next Monday, they said to me. I wish the *Times* would show them up!"

"Did you go again?"

"Did I!—no," fumed Reginald. "Just to add to their pockets by another half-guinea! I hadn't got it to give, Maria. I just flung the whole lot over, and went down to the first ship in the dock and engaged myself."

"As what?" she asked.

"As A. B."

"A. B.?" repeated Maria, puzzled.

"You don't mean—surely you don't mean before the mast?"

"Yes I do."

"Oh, Reginald!"

"It doesn't make much difference," cried Reginald, in a slighting tone. "The mates in some of those ships are not much better off than the seamen: you must work, and the food's pretty much the same, except at the skipper's table. Let a fellow get up to be first mate, and he is in tolerably smooth water; but until then he must rough it. After this voyage I'll go up again."

"But you might have shipped as third mate."

"I might—if I had taken my time to find a berth. But who was to keep me the while? It takes fifteen shil-

lings a week at the Sailors' Home, besides odds and ends for yourself that you can't do without—smoke, and things. I couldn't bear to ask them for more at home. Only think how long I have been on shore this time, Maria. I was knocking about in London for weeks over my navigation, preparing to pass.—And for the mummies to turn me, at last!"

Maria sighed. Poor Reginald's gloomy prospects were bringing her pain.

"There's another thing, Maria," he resumed. "If I had passed for second mate, I don't see how I could go out as such. Where was my outfit to come from? An officer—if he is on any thing of a ship—must be spruce, and have proper toggery. I am quite certain that to go out as second mate on a good ship would have cost me twenty pounds for additional things that I couldn't do without. You can't get a sextant under three pounds, second-hand, if it's worth having. You know I never could have come upon them for twenty pounds at home, under their altered circumstances."

Maria made no reply. Every word was going to her heart.

"Whereas in shipping as common seaman, I don't want to take much more than you might tie in a handkerchief. A fo'castle fellow can shift any way aboard. And there's one advantage," ingenuously added Reginald, "if I take no traps out with me I can't lose them."

"But the discomfort?" breathed Maria.

"There's enough of that any way at sea. A little more or less of it is not of much account in the long run. It's all in the voyage. I wish I had never been such a fool as to choose the sea. But I did; so it's of no use kicking at it now."

"I wish you were not going as you are!" said Maria, earnestly. "I wish you had shipped as third mate!"

"When a sailor can't afford the time to ship as he would, he must ship as he can. Many a hundred has done the same before me. To one third

mate that's wanted in the port of London, there are scores and scores of A. B. seamen."

"What does mamma say to it?"

"Well, you know she can't afford to be fastidious now. She cried a bit, but I told her I should be all right. Hard work and fo'castle living won't break bones. The parson told me——"

"Don't, Reginald!"

"Papa, then. He told me it was a move in the right direction, and if I would only go on so, I might make up for past short-comings. I say, Isaac told me to give you his love."

"Did you see much of him?"

"No. On a Sunday now and then. He doesn't much like his new place. They are dreadfully overworked, he says. It's quite a different thing from what the bank was down here."

"Will he not stop in it?"

"Oh, he'll stop in it. Glad, too. It won't answer for him to be doing nothing, when they can hardly keep themselves at home with the little bit of money screwed out from what's put aside for the Chisholms."

Reginald never meant to hurt her. He but spoke so in his thoughtlessness. He rattled on.

"I saw George Godolphin last week. It was on the Monday, the day that swindling board first turned me back. I flung the books anywhere, and went out miles, to walk my passion off. I got into the Park, to Rotten-row. It's precious empty at this season, not more than a dozen horses in it; but who should be coming along but George Godolphin and Mrs. Pain with a groom behind them. She was riding that beautiful horse of hers that she used to cut a dash with here in the summer; the one that folks said George gave——" Incautious Reginald coughed down the conclusion of his sentence, whistled a bar or two of a sea-song, and then resumed:

"George was well mounted too."

"Did you speak to them?" asked Maria.

"Of course I did," replied Reginald, with a slight surprise. "And

Mrs. Pain began scolding me for not having been to see her and the Ver-ralls. She made me promise to go down the next evening. They live at a pretty place down on the banks of the Thames. You take the rail at Waterloo-bridge."

"Did you go?"

"Well, I did, as I had promised. But I didn't care much. I had been at my books all day again, and in the evening, quite late, I started. When I got there I found it was a tea-fight."

"A tea-fight!" echoed Maria, rather uncertain what the expression might mean.

"A regular tea-fight," repeated Reginald. "A dozen folks, ladies mostly, dressed up to the nines: and there was I in my worn-out old sailor's jacket. Charlotte began blowing me up for not coming to dinner, and she made me go in to the dining-room and had it brought up for me. Lots of good things! I haven't tasted such a dinner since I've been on shore. Ver-rall gave me some champagne."

"Was George there?" inquired Maria, putting the question with apparent indifference.

"No, George wasn't there. Charlotte said if she had thought of it she'd have invited Isaac to meet me: but Isaac was shy of them, she added, and had never been down once, though she had asked him several times. She's a good-natured one, Maria, is that Charlotte Pain."

"Yes," quietly responded Maria.

"She told me she knew how young sailors got out of money in London, and she shouldn't think of my standing the cost of responding to her invitation; and she gave me a sovereign."

Maria's cheeks burnt. "You did not take it, Reginald?"

"Didn't I! It was like a godsend. You don't know how scarce money has been with me. Things have altered, you know, Maria. And Mrs. Pain knows it, too, and she has got no stuck-up nonsense about her. She made me promise to go and see them

when I had passed. But I have not passed," added Reginald, by way of parenthesis. "And she said if I was at fault for a home the next time I was looking out for a ship, she'd give me one, and be happy to see me. And I thought it very kind of her, for I am sure she meant it. Oh—by the way—she said she thought you'd let her have Meta up for a few weeks."

Maria involuntarily stretched out her hand,—as if Meta was there and she would clasp her and hold her from some threatened danger. Reginald rose.

"You are not going yet, Regy!"

"I must. I only ran in for a few moments. There's Grace to see and fifty more folks, and they'll expect me home to dinner. I'll say good-by to Meta as I go through the garden. I saw she was there; but she did not see me."

He bent to kiss her. Maria held his hand in hers. "I shall be thinking of you always, Reginald. If you were but going under happier circumstances!"

"Never mind me, Maria. It will be up-hill work with most of us, I suppose, for a time. I thought it the best thing I could do. I couldn't bear to come upon them for more money at home."

"Yours will be a hard life."

"A sailor's is that, at best. Don't worry about me. I shall make it out somehow. You make haste, Maria, and get strong. I'm sure you look sick enough to frighten folks."

She pressed his hands between hers, and the tears were filling her eyes as she raised them, their expression one wild yearning. "Reginald, try and do your duty," she whispered, in an imploring tone. "Think always of Heaven, and try and work for it. It may be very near. I have got to think of it a great deal now."

"It's all right, Maria," was the careless and characteristic answer. "It's a religious ship I'm going in this time. We have had to sign articles for divine service on board at half-past ten every Sunday morning."

He kissed her several times, and the door closed upon him. As Maria lay back in her chair, she heard his voice outside for some time afterwards, laughing and talking with Meta, largely promising her a ship-load of monkeys, parrots, and various other live wonders.

In this way or that, she was continually being reminded of the unhappy past and their share in it; she was perpetually having brought before her its disastrous effects upon others. Poor Reginald! entering upon his hard life! This need not have been, had the means not grown scarce at home. Maria loved him the best of all her brothers, and her very soul seemed to ache with its remorse. And by some means or other, she was, as you see, frequently learning that Mr. George was not breaking his heart in remorse. The suffering in all ways fell upon her.

And the time went on, and Maria Godolphin grew no stronger.

CHAPTER LX.

A SHADOW OF THE FUTURE.

THE time had gone on, and Maria Godolphin, instead of growing stronger, grew weaker. Mr. Snow could do nothing more than he had done; he sent her tonic medicines still, and called upon her now and then, as a friend more than as a doctor. The strain was on the mind, he concluded, and time alone would heal it.

But Maria was worse than Mr. Snow or anybody else thought. She had been always so delicate-looking, so gentle, that her wan face, her sunken spirits, attracted less attention than they would have done in one of a more robust nature. Nobody glanced at the possibility of danger. Margery's expressed opinion, "My mistress only wants rousing," was the one universally adopted: and there may have been truth in it.

All question of Maria's going out-of-doors was over now. She was really not equal to it. She would lie for hours together on her sofa, the little child Meta gathered in her arms. Meta appeared to have changed her very nature: instead of dancing about incessantly, running into every mischief, she was content to nestle to her mother's bosom and listen to her whispered words, as if some foreshadowing were on her spirit that she might not long have a mother to nestle to.

You must not think that Maria conformed to the usages of an invalid. She was up before breakfast in a morning, she did not go to bed until the usual hour at night, and she sat down to the customary meals with Meta. She has risen from the breakfast-table now, on this fine morning, not at all cold for the late autumn, and Margery has carried away the breakfast-things, and has told Miss Meta, that if she'll come out as soon as her mamma has read to her and have her things put on, she can go and play in the garden.

But when the little Bible-story was over, her mamma lay down on the sofa, and Meta appeared inclined to do the same. She hustled on to it and lay down too, and kissed her mamma's face, so pretty still, and began to chatter. It was a charming day, the sun shining on the few late flowers, and the sky blue and bright.

"Did you hear Margery say you might go out and play, darling? See how fine it is."

"There's nothing to play with," said Meta.

"There are many things, dear. Your skipping-rope, and hoop, and——"

"I'm tired of them," interposed Meta. "Mamma, I wish you'd come out and play at something with me."

"I couldn't run, dear. I am not strong enough."

"When shall you be strong enough? How long will it be before you get well?"

Maria did not answer. She lay with her eyes fixed outwards, her arm clasped round the child. "Meta dar-

ling, I—I—am not sure that I shall get well. I begin to think that I shall never go out with you again."

Meta did not answer. She was looking out also, her eyes staring straight up to the blue sky.

"Meta darling," resumed Maria, in a low tone, "you had two little sisters once, and I cried out when they died, but I am glad now that they went. They are in heaven."

Meta looked up more fixedly, and pointed with her finger. "Up in the blue sky."

"Yes, up in heaven. Meta, I think I am going to them. It is a better world than this."

"And me too?" quickly cried Meta.

Maria laid her hand upon her bosom to press down the rising emotion. "Meta, Meta, if I might but take you with me!" she breathed, straining the child to her in an agony. The prospect of parting, which Maria had begun to look at, was indeed hard to bear.

"You can't go and leave me," cried Meta, in alarm. "Who'd take care of me, mamma? Mamma! do you mean that you are going to die?"

Meta burst into tears; Maria cried with her. Oh, reader, reader! do you know what it is, this parting between mother and child? To lay a child in the grave is bitter grief; but to leave it to the mercy of the world;—there is nothing like unto it in human anguish.

Maria's arms were entwined around the little girl, clasping her nervously, as if that might prevent the future parting; the soft, rounded cheek was pressed to hers, the golden curls lay around.

"Only for a little while, Meta. If I go first, it will be but for a little while. You——" Maria stopped; her emotion had to be choked down.

"It is a happier world than this, Meta," she resumed, overmastering it. "There will be no pain there; no sickness, no sorrow. This world seems made up of sorrow, Meta. Oh, child! but for God's love in holding out to our view that other one, we

could never bear this when trouble comes. God took your little sisters and brothers from it; and—I think—He is taking me.”

Meta turned her face downwards, and laid hold of her mother with a frightened movement, her little fingers clasping the thin arms to pain.

“The winter is coming on here, my child, and the trees will soon be bare; the snow will cover the earth, and we must wrap ourselves up from it. But in that other world there will be no winter; no cold to chill us; no sultry summer heat to exhaust us. It will be a pleasant world, Meta, and God will love us.”

Meta was crying silently. “Let me go, too, mamma.”

“In a little while, darling. If God calls me first, it is His will,” she continued, the sobs breaking from her aching heart. “I shall ask Him to take care of you after I am gone, and to bring you to me in time. I am asking Him always.”

“Who’ll be my mamma then?” cried Meta, lifting her head in a bustle, as the thought occurred to her.

More pain. Maria choked it down, and stroked the golden curls.

“You will have no mamma then in this world—only papa.”

Meta paused. “Will he take me to London, to Mrs. Pain?”

The startled shock that these simple words brought to Maria cannot well be pictured: her breath stood still, her heart beat wildly. “Why do you ask that?” she said, her tears suddenly dried.

Meta had to collect her childish thoughts to tell why. “When you were in bed ill, and Mrs. Pain wrote me that pretty letter, she said if papa would take me up to London, she’d be my mamma for a little while, in place of you.”

The spell was broken. The happy visions of heaven, of love, had been displaced for Maria. She lay quite silent, and in the stillness the bells of All Souls’ Church were heard to strike out a joyous peal on the morning air. Meta clapped her hands and lifted her

face, radiant now with glee. Moods require not time to change in childhood: now sunshine, now rain. Margery opened the door.

“Do you hear ’em, ma’am?—the bell for Miss Cecil. They be as glad as the day. I said she’d have it fine last night, when I found the wind had changed. I can’t a-bear to hear wedding-bells ring out on a wet day; the two don’t accord. Eh me! why here’s Miss Rose a-coming in.”

Rose Hastings was walking up the garden-path with a quick step, nodding at Meta as she came along. That young lady slipped off the sofa, and ran out to meet her, and Maria rose up from her sick position, and strove to look her best.

“I have come for Meta,” said Rose, as she entered. “Mamma thinks she would like to see the wedding. Will you let her come, Maria?”

Meta hesitated. “In the church, do you mean? Suppose she should not be good?”

“I will be good,” said Meta, in a high state of delight at the prospect. “Mamma, I’ll be very good.”

She went with Margery to be dressed. Rose turned to her sister. “Are you pretty well this morning, Maria?”

“Pretty well, Rose. I cannot boast of much strength yet.”

“I wish you would return with me and Meta. Mamma told me to try and bring you. To spend the day with us will be a change, and you need not go near the church.”

“I don’t feel equal to it, Rose. I should not have the strength to walk. Tell mamma so, with my dear love.”

“Maria, I wonder they did not ask you to the wedding.”

“Do you? It is a foolish wonder, Rose. I am not sufficiently well for weddings, even had other circumstances been favorable. Cecil was here yesterday, and sat an hour with me.”

“Only fancy!—she is to be married in a bonnet!” exclaimed Rose, with indignation. “A bonnet and a gray dress. I wonder Lord Averil con-

sented to it! I should hardly call it a wedding. A bonnet!—and no breakfast!—and Bessy Godolphin and Lord Averil's sister, who is older, if any thing, than Bessy, for the bridesmaids!"

"Would a gayer wedding have been consistent—under the circumstances?"

Rose knitted her brow at the words, but smoothed her hand over it, remembering who was looking at her. "I—I do not see, Maria," she hesitatingly said, "that what has past need throw its shade on the wedding of Cecil and Lord Averil."

"And the state of Thomas Godolphin."

"Ah, yes, to be sure! I was not thinking of him. But it is very dreadful to be married without a wreath and a veil, and with only a couple of old bridesmaids."

"And by only one clergyman," added Maria, her lips parting with a smile. "Do you think the marriage will stand good, Rose?"

Rose felt inclined to resent the joke. The illusions of the wedding-day were, in her eyes, absolutely necessary to the marriage-ceremony. Meta came in, ready; as full of bustling excitement as ever; eager to be gone. She kissed her mamma in careless haste, and was impatient because Rose lingered to say a word. Maria watched her down the path,—her face and eyes sparkling, her feet dancing with eagerness, her laughter ringing in the air.

"She has forgotten already her tears for the parting that must come," murmured Maria. "How soon, I wonder, after I shall be gone, will she forget me?"

She laid her temples lightly against the window-frame, as she looked dreamily at the blue sky; as she listened dreamily to the sweet bells that rang out so merrily in the ears of Prior's Ash.

CHAPTER LXI.

NEARER AND NEARER FOR THOMAS GODOLPHIN.

PRIOR'S ASH lingered at its doors and its windows, curious to witness the outer signs of Cecilia Godolphin's wedding. The arrangements for it were to them more a matter of speculation than of certainty, since various rumors had gone afloat, and were eagerly caught up, although of the most contradictory character. All that appeared certain as yet was that the day was charming and the bells were ringing.

How the beadle kept the gates that day, he alone knew. That staff of his was brought a great deal more into requisition than was liked by the sea of noses pressing there. And when the first carriage came, the excitement in the street was great.

The *first* carriage! There were but two; that and another. Prior's Ash turned up its disappointed nose, and wondered, with Rose Hastings, what the world was coming to.

It was a chariot drawn by four horses. The livery of the postilions and the coronet on the panels proclaimed it to be Lord Averil's. He sat inside it with Thomas Godolphin. The carriage following it was Lady Godolphin's and appeared to contain only ladies, all wearing bonnets and colored gowns. The exasperated gazers, who had bargained for something very different, set up a half groan.

They set up a whole ðne, those round the gates, when Lord Averil and his friend alighted. But the groan was not one of exasperation, or of anger. It was a low murmur of sorrow, of sympathy, and it was called forth by the appearance of Thomas Godolphin. It was some little time now since Thomas Godolphin had been seen in public, and the change in him was startling. He walked forward, leaning on the arm of Lord Averil, lifting his hat to the greeting that was breathed around; a greeting

of sorrow meant, as he knew, not for the peer, but for him, and his fading life. The few scanty hairs stood out to their view as he uncovered his head, and the ravages of the disease that was killing him were all too conspicuous on his wasted features.

"God bless him. He's very nigh upon the grave."

Who said it of the crowd, Thomas Godolphin could not tell, but the words and their accent, full of rude sympathy, came distinctly upon his ear. He quitted the viscount's arm, turned to them, and raised his hands with a solemn meaning.

"God bless you all, my friends. I am indeed near upon the grave. Should there be any here who have suffered injury through me, let them forgive me for it. It was not intentionally done, and I may almost say that I am expiating it with my life. May God bless you all, here and hereafter!"

Something like a sob burst from the astonished crowd. But that he had hastened on with Lord Averil, they might have fallen on their knees and clung to him in their flood-tide of respect and love.

The Reverend Mr. Hastings stood in his surplice at the altar. He, too, was changed. The keen, vigorous, healthy man had now a gray, worn look. He could not forget the blow; minister though he was, he could not forgive George Godolphin. He was not quite sure that he forgave Thomas for not having looked more closely after his brother and the bank generally: had he done so, the calamity might never have occurred. Every hour of the day reminded Mr. Hastings of his loss, in the discomforts which had necessarily fallen on his home, in the position of his daughter Maria. George Godolphin had never been a favorite of his: he had tried to like him in vain. It was strange that where so many owned to the fascination of George Godolphin, the rector of All Souls' and his daughter Grace had held aloof,—had disliked him. Could it have been some mys-

terious friendly warning of future ill, which would make itself heard in the heart of Mr. Hastings and whisper him not to give away Maria? At any rate, it had not answered. He had given her, and he had striven to like her husband afterwards: but he had not fully succeeded: he never would have succeeded without this last blow, which had drawn him under its wheels with so many others. The rector of All Souls' was a man of severe judgment, and rumor had made too free with gay George's name for him to find favor with the rector.

He stood there, waiting for the wedding-party. A few ladies were in the church in their pews, and Rose Hastings sat there with Meta. All eyes were turned to the door in expectation: but when the group entered there was not much to see. No cortege, no marshaling, no veils, no plumes, no any thing! But that Rose was prepared for it, she would have shrieked out with indignation.

Lord Averil was the first to enter. Cecilia Godolphin came next with Thomas. She wore a light-gray silk robe, and a plain, white bonnet, trimmed inside with orange-blossoms. The Honorable Miss Averil and Bessy Godolphin followed,—old in Rose Hastings's opinion, certainly old for bridesmaids,—their silk dresses of a darker shade of gray, and their white bonnets without the orange-blossoms. Lady Godolphin was next, more splendid than any, in a lemon brocaded dress that stood on end with richness.

Did the recollection of the last wedding-service he had performed for a Godolphin cause the rector of All Souls' voice to be subdued now as he read? Seven years ago he had stood there as he was standing to-day, George and Maria before him. How had that promising union ended? And for the keeping of his sworn vows, George best knew what he had kept and what he had broken. The rector was thinking of that past ceremony now.

This one was over. The promises

were made, the register signed, and Lord Averil was leading Cecilia from the church, when the rector stepped before them and took her hand.

"I pray God that your union may be more happy than some others have been," he said. "That, in a great degree, rests with you, Lord Averil. Take care of her."

Her eyes filled with tears, but the viscount grasped his hand warmly, "I will; I will."

"Let me bless you both, Averil!" broke in the quiet voice of Thomas Godolphin. "It may be that I shall not see you again to do it."

"Oh, but we shall meet again; you must not die yet," exclaimed Lord Averil, with feverish eagerness. "My friend, I would rather part with the whole world, save Cecil, than with you."

Their hands lingered together—and separated. Not very long now would Thomas keep them out of Ashlydyat.

The beadle was nobbing his stick on the heads and noses with great force, and the excited crowd pushed and danced round that traveling carriage, but they made their way to it. The placing in Cecil and the taking his place beside her seemed to be but the work of a moment, so quickly did it pass, and Lord Averil, a pleasant smile upon his face, bowed to the shouts on either side as the carriage threaded its way through the throng. Not until it had got into clear ground did the postilions put their horses to a canter, and the bridegroom and the bride were fairly away on their bridal tour.

There was more ceremony needed to place the ladies in the other carriage. Lady Godolphin's skirts, in their extensive richness, took five minutes to arrange of themselves, ere a space could be found for Thomas Godolphin beside her. The footman held the door for him.

"No," he said; "I will follow you presently."

Bessy felt startled. "You will not

attempt to walk?" she said, leaning forward.

He smiled at her,—at the utter futility of such an attempt now. The time for walking to Ashlydyat was past for Thomas Godolphin.

"A fly is coming for me, Bessy. I have a call or two to make."

Lady Godolphin's carriage drove away, and Thomas turned into the rectory. Mrs. Hastings, gray, worn, old, ten years older than she had been six months before, came forward to greet him, commiseration in every line of her countenance.

"I thought I would say good-by to you," he said, as he held her hands in his. "It will be my only opportunity. I expect this is my last quitting of Ashlydyat."

"Say good-by?" she faltered. "Are you—are you—so near—"

"Look at me," quietly said Thomas, answering her unfinished sentence.

But there was an interruption. Bustling little feet and a busy little tongue came upon them. Miss Meta had broken from Rose and run in alone, throwing her straw-hat aside as she entered.

"Uncle Thomas! Uncle Thomas! I saw you at the wedding, Uncle Thomas."

He sat down and took the child on his knee. "And I saw Meta," he answered. "How is mamma? I am going to see her presently."

"Mamma's not well," said Meta, shaking her head. "Mamma cries often. She was crying this morning. Uncle Thomas,"—lowering her voice and speaking slowly,—"*mamma says she's going to heaven.*"

There was a startled pause. Thomas broke it by laying his hand upon the golden-haired head.

"I trust we are all going there, Meta,—a little earlier or a little later, as God shall will. It will not much matter when."

A few minutes' conversation, and Thomas Godolphin went out to the fly which waited for him. Bexley, who was with it, helped him in.

"Mrs. George Godolphin's."

The attentive old retainer—older by twenty years than Thomas, but younger in health and vigor—carefully assisted his master up the garden-path. Maria saw the approach from the window. Why it was she knew not, but she was feeling unusually ill that day,—scarcely able to rise to a sitting position on the sofa. Thomas was shocked at the alteration in her, and involuntarily thought of the child's words, "Mamma says she's going to heaven."

"I thought I should like to say farewell to you, Maria," he said, as he drew a chair near her. "I did not expect to find you looking so ill."

She had burst into tears. Whether it was the unusual depression of her own spirits, or his wan face, emotion overcame her.

"It has been too much for both of us," he murmured, holding her hands. "We must forgive him, Maria. It was done in carelessness, perhaps, but not in willfulness."

"No, no; not in willfulness," she whispered. "He is my husband and your brother still."

There was a lull in their emotion. Thomas gave her some of the details of the wedding, and she was beguiled to ask different questions. "Do you know what George is likely to do?" he suddenly inquired.

"No; I wish I did know. He talks much of this promise of Lord Averil's, and says he is looking out for something to do in the mean while. The uncertainty troubles me greatly. We cannot live on nothing."

"Has he sent you any money lately?" asked Thomas, in a voice of hesitation.

Maria's face flushed. "He gave me ten pounds when he was at home last, and it is not spent yet."

Thomas leaned his head on his hand musingly. "I wonder where he gets it?"

Maria was silent. To say "I think he is helped by Mr. Verrall," might only have given Thomas fresh pain. "It is very kind of you to come to

see me," she said, changing the subject. "I feel it dull here all day alone."

"Why do you not come to Ashlydyat sometimes? You know we should be glad to see you."

She shook her head. "I can't go out, Thomas. And indeed I am not strong enough for it now."

"But Maria, you should not give way to this grief,—this weakness. You are young; you have no incurable complaint as I have."

"I don't know," she sighed. "At times I feel as though I should never be well again. I—I—have been so reproached, Thomas; so much blame has been cast to me by all people; it has been as if I had made away with their money; and you know that I was as innocent as they were. And there have been other things. If—if——"

"If what?" asked Thomas, leaning over her.

She was sitting back upon the sofa, her fair young face wan and colorless, her delicate hands clasped together, as in apathy. "If it were not for leaving Meta, I should be glad to die."

"Hush, Maria! Rather say you are glad to live for her sake. George may, by some means or other, become prosperous again, and you may once more have a happy home. You are young, I say. You must bear up against this weakness."

"If I could but pay all we owe; our personal debts!" she whispered, unconsciously giving utterance to the vain longing that was ever working in her heart. "Papa's nine thousand pounds—and Mrs. Bond's ten pounds—and the Jekyls—and the tradespeople!"

"If I could but have paid!" he rejoined, in a voice broken by emotion. "If I could—if I could—I should have gone easier to the grave. Maria, we have a God, remember, who sees all our pangs, all our bitter sorrow: but for Him, and my trust in Him, I should have died long ago of the pain. Things have latterly been

soothed to me in a most wonderful manner. I seem to feel that I can leave all the sorrow I have caused to Him, trusting to Him to shed down the recompense. We never know until our need of it comes, what His mercy is."

Maria covered her face with her hand. Thomas rose.

"You are not going?" she exclaimed.

"Yes, for I must hasten home. This has been a morning of exertion, and I find there's no strength left in me. God bless you, Maria."

"Are we never to meet again?" she asked, as he held her thin hands in his, and she looked up at him through her blinding tears.

"I hope we shall meet again, Maria, and be together forever and forever. The threshold of the next world is opening to me: this is closing. Fare you well, child; fare you well."

Bexley came to him as he opened the parlor-door. Thomas asked for Margery: he would have said a kind word to her. But Margery had gone out.

Maria stood at the window, and watched him with her wet eyes as he walked down the path to the fly, supported by Bexley. The old man closed the door on the master and took his seat by the driver. Thomas looked forth as they drove away, and smiled a last farewell.

A farewell in the deepest sense of the word. It was the last look, the last smile, that Maria would receive in this life from Thomas Godolphin.

CHAPTER LXII.

A PEACEFUL HOUR IN THE PORCH OF ASHLYDYAT.

IN the old porch at Ashlydyat of which you have heard so much, sat Thomas Godolphin. An invalid-chair had been placed there, and he lay back on its pillows in the afternoon

sun of the late autumn. A warm, sunny autumn, had it been; a real "Ete de St. Martin." He was feeling wondrously well; almost, but for his ever-present feeling of weakness, quite well. His fatigue of the previous day—that of Cecil's wedding—had left no permanent effects upon him, and had he not known thoroughly his own hopeless state, he might have fancied this afternoon that he was about to get well all one day.

Not in his looks. Pale, wan, ghastly were they; the shadow of the grim, implacable visitor that was so soon to come was already on them: but the face in its calm stillness told of ineffable peace: the brunt of the storm had passed.

The white walls of Lady Godolphin's Folly glittered brightly in the distance; the dark-blue sky was seen through the branches of the trees, growing bare and more bare against the coming winter; the warm rays of the sun fell on Thomas Godolphin. In his hand he held a book from which others than Thomas Godolphin have derived courage and consolation,— "God is love." He was reading at that moment of the great love of God towards those who strive, as he had done, to live for Him; he looked up, repeating the sentence: "He loves them in death and will love them through the never-ending ages of the world to come." Just then his eyes fell on the figure of Margery, who was advancing towards Ashlydyat. Thomas closed his book, and held out his hand.

"My mistress told me you'd have said Good-by to me yesterday, Mr. Thomas, and it was just my ill-luck to be out. I'd gone to take the child's shoes to be mended,—she wears 'em out fast, she does. But you are not going to leave us yet, sir?"

"I know not how soon it may be, Margery: very long it cannot be. Sit down."

She stood yet, however, looking at him, disregarding the bench to which he had pointed,—stood with a saddened expression and compressed lips. Mar-

gery's was an experienced eye, and it may be that she saw the shadow which had taken up its abode in his face.

"You be going to see my old master and mistress, sir," she burst forth, dashing some rebellious moisture from her eyes. "Mr. Thomas, do you recollect it?—my poor mistress sat here in this porch the very day she died."

"I remember it well, Margery. I am dying quietly, thank God, as my mother died."

"And what a blessing it is when folks can die quietly, with their conscience and all about 'em at peace!" ejaculated Margery. "I wonder how Mr. George 'ud have took it, if he'd been called instead o' you, sir?"

There was considerable acrimony, not to say sarcasm in the remark; perhaps not altogether suitable to the scene and interview. Good Thomas Godolphin would not see it or appear to have noticed it. He took Margery's hands in his.

"I never thought once that I should die leaving you in debt, Margery," he said, his earnest tone bearing its own emotion. "It was always my intention to bequeath you an annuity that would have kept you from want in your old age. But it has been decreed otherwise; and it is of no use to speak of what might have been. Miss Janet will refund to you by degrees what you have lost in the bank; and so long as you live you will be welcome to a home with her. She has not much, but——"

"Now never fash yourself about me, Mr. Thomas," interrupted Margery. "I shall do well, I dare say: I'm young enough yet for work, I hope; I shan't starve. Ah, this world's nothing but a peck o' troubles," she added, with a loud sigh. "You'll find that, sir, when you've left it: and it's a happy thing for them as can learn as much afore they go."

"The troubles have nearly passed, for me," he said, a smile illumining his wan and wasted features.

"It's to be hoped they have, sir.

But you were always one to think and care for others: and it is by such that troubles stand the longest and are felt the deepest. If one didn't learn with one's mother's milk, as it were, that all God does is for the best, one might be tempted to wonder why He lets 'em come to such as you. This world has had its share of sorrow for you, Mr. Thomas."

"I am on the threshold, of a better, Margery," was his quiet answer: "one where sorrow cannot enter."

Margery sat for some little time on the bench, talking to him. They had gone back in thought to old times, to the illness and death of Mrs. Godolphin, to the long-gone scenes of the past, whether of pleasure or of pain,—a past which for us all seems to bear a charm when recalled to the memory which it had never borne when present. At length Margery rose to depart, declining the invitation to enter the house or to see the ladies, and Thomas said to her his last farewell.

"My late missis, I remember, looked once or twice during her illness as gray as he do," she cogitated with herself as she went along. "But it strikes me that with him it's death: I've a great mind to ask old Snow what he thinks. If it is so, Mr. George ought to be telegraphed for; they be brothers, after all."

Margery made her way direct to the house of Mr. Snow. Mr. Snow was absent, but Mr. Snow's boy was keeping the surgery, and by way of doing it agreeably, was standing on his head on the counter.

"Now then!" cried Margery, in her sharpest accent, "is that how you attend to the place in your master's absence? Where is he?"

The boy had scuttered to his feet on the floor, very much relieved when he saw the intruder was only Margery. "He's caught up into the moon," cried he, impudently.

"I'll catch you, if you don't behave yourself," rebuked Margery. "You tell me where your master is."

"If he ain't there he's elsewhere,"

retorted the bold boy. "This here surgery haven't seen the color of his skin since morning."

Giving the boy a smart box on the ear to remind him of her visit, Margery went out again. About half way home she encountered Mr. Snow. He was coming along on the run, and would have passed Margery, but she arrested him.

"There's no bumbailie after you, is there?" cried she, in her free manners. "Can't you stop a minute, sir?"

"I've been a few miles up the line and have got back late; the train was twenty minutes behind its time. What is it, Margery-woman?"

"Well, I want to know your opinion of Mr. Godolphin, sir. I have just been up to see him, and I don't like his look."

"Does he look worse than usual?"

"If I am not mistaken he looks as he have never looked yet; as folks can look but once in their lives—and that's right afore death," returned Margery. "When shall you see him, sir?"

"This evening if I possibly can. Not that any thing can be done for him: as we all know too well."

"I'd like to ask you another question, sir, now that we are by ourselves," resumed Margery, laying hold of his coat-tails lest he should evade her. "What's your true opinion of my mistress?"

"I don't know; I haven't got one," replied Mr. Snow, too impulsively for any thing but truth. "Sometimes I think she'll get over this weakness and do well; at others I am tempted to think—something else. Take as much care as you can of her?"

He shook his coat free and started off, running as before. Margery continued her way, which led her past the turning to the railway station. She cast an eye on the passengers coming from the train,—who had not joined in the speed adopted by Mr. Snow,—and in the last of them saw her master, Mr. George Godolphin.

Margery halted and rubbed her

eyes, and almost wondered whether it was a vision. Her mind had been buried in the question, should she, or should she not, telegraph for him; and there he was, before her view. Gay, handsome George! with his ever-distinguished entourage (I don't know a better word in English); his bearing, his attire, his person so essentially the gentleman; his pleasant face and his winning smile.

That smile was directed to Margery as he came up. He bore in his hand a small basket of wicker-work, its projecting top covered with delicate tissue paper. But for the bent of Margery's thoughts at the time, she would not have been particularly surprised at the sight of him, for Mr. George's visits to Prior's Ash were generally impromptu ones, paid without warning. She met him rather eagerly: speaking the impulse that had been in her mind,—to send a message for him, on account of the state of his brother.

"Is he worse?" asked George eagerly.

"If ever I saw death writ in a face, it's writ in his, sir," returned Margery.

George hesitated a moment. "I think I will go up to Ashlydyat without loss of time then," he said, turning back. But he stopped to give the basket into Margery's hands.

"It is for your mistress, Margery. How is she?"

"She's nothing to boast of," replied Margery, in a tone and with a stress that might have awakened George's suspicions, had any fears with reference to his wife's state yet penetrated his mind. But they had not. "I wish I could see her get a little bit o' life into her, and then the health might be the next thing to come," concluded Margery.

"Tell her I shall soon be home." And George Godolphin proceeded to Ashlydyat.

It may be that he had not the faculty of distinguishing the different indications that a countenance gives forth, or it may be that to find his

brother sitting in the porch, disarmed his doubts; but certainly George saw no cause to endorse the fears expressed by Margery. She had entered into no details, and George had pictured in his own mind Thomas as in bed. To see him therefore sitting out-of-doors, quietly reading, certainly lulled all George's present fears.

Not but that the ravages in the worn form, the gray look in the pale face, struck him as it was lifted to his,—struck him almost with awe. For a few minutes their hands were locked together in silence. Generous Thomas Godolphin! never since the proceedings had terminated, the daily details were over, had he breathed a word of the bankruptcy and its unhappiness to George.

"George, I am glad to see you. I have been wishing for you all day. I think you must have been sent on purpose."

"Margery sent me. I met her as I was coming from the train."

It was not to Margery that Thomas Godolphin had alluded—but he let it pass. "Sent on purpose," he repeated aloud. "George, I think the end is very near."

"But you are surely better?" returned George, speaking in his impulse. "Unless you were better would you be sitting here?"

"Do you remember, George, my mother sat here in the afternoon of the day she died? A feeling came over me to-day that I should enjoy a breath of the open air, but it was not until after they had brought my chair out and I was installed in it that I thought of my mother. It struck me as being a curious coincidence,—almost an omen. Margery recollected the circumstance, and spoke of it."

The words imparted a strange sensation to George, a shivering dread. "Are you in much pain, Thomas?" he asked.

"Not much; a little, at times; but the great agony that used to come upon me has quite passed,—as it did with my mother, you know."

Could George Godolphin help the

feeling of bitter contrition that came over him? He had been less than man, lower than human, had he helped it. Perhaps the full self-reproach of his conduct never came home to him as it came now. With all his faults, his lightness, he loved his brother: and it seemed that it was he—he—who had made the face wan, the hair gray, who had broken the already sufficiently stricken heart, and had sent him to his grave before his time.

"It is my fault," he spoke in his emotion. "But for me, Thomas, you might have been with us, at any rate another year or two. The trouble has told upon you."

"Yes, it has told upon me," Thomas quietly answered. There was nothing else that he could answer.

"Don't think of it, Thomas," was the imploring prayer. "It cannot be helped now."

"No, it cannot be helped," Thomas rejoined. But he did not add that, even now, it was disturbing his death-bed. "George," he said, taking his brother's hands, "but that it seems so great an improbability, I would ask you to repay to our poor neighbors and friends what they have lost, should it ever be in your power. Who knows but you may be rich some time? You are young and capable, and the world is before you. If so, think of them: it is my last request to you."

"It would be my own wish to do it," gravely answered George. "But do not think of it, Thomas; do not let it trouble you."

"It does not trouble me much now. The thought of the wrong inflicted on them is ever-present to me, but I am content to leave that, and all else, in the care of the all-potent, ever-merciful God. He can recompense better than I could, even had I my energies and life left to me."

There was a pause. George loosed his brother's hands and took a seat on the bench, where Margery had sat,—the very seat where he had once sat with his two sticks, in his weakness, years before, when the stranger, Mr. Appleby, came up and inquired for

Mr. Verrall. Why or wherefore it should have come, George could not tell, but that day flashed over his memory now. Oh, the bitter remembrance! He had been a lightsome man then, without care, free from that depressing incubus that must, or that ought to, weigh down the soul,—cruel wrong inflicted on his fellow-toilers in the great journey of life. And now? He had brought the evil of poverty upon himself, the taint of disgrace upon his name; he had driven his sisters from their home; had sent that fair and proud inheritance of the Godolphins, Ashlydyat, into the barter-market; and had hastened the passage of his brother to the grave. Ay! dash your bright hair from your brow as you will, George Godolphin!—pass your cambric handkerchief over your heated face!—you cannot dash away the remembrance. You have done all this, and the consciousness is very present to you now.

Thomas Godolphin interrupted his reflections, bending towards George his wasted features. "George, what are your prospects?"

"I have tried to get into something or other in London, but my trying has been useless. All the places that are worth having are so snapped up. I have been offered something in Calcutta, and I think I shall accept it. If I find that Maria has no objection to go out, I shall: I came down today to talk it over with her."

"Is it through Lord Averil?"

"Yes. He wrote to me yesterday morning before he went to church with Cecil. I got the letter by the evening mail, and came off this morning."

"And what is the appointment? Is it in the civil service?"

"Nothing so grand—in sound, at any rate. It's only mercantile. The situation is at an indigo merchant's, or planter's; I am not sure which. But it's a good appointment; one that a gentleman may accept: and the pay is liberal. Lord Averil urges it upon me,—these merchants, they are

brothers, are friends of his. If I decline it, he will try for a civil appointment for me, but to obtain one might take a considerable time; and there might be other difficulties."

"Yes," said Thomas, shortly. "By what little I can judge, this appears to me to be eligible, just what will suit you."

"I think so. If I accept it, I shall have to start with the new year. I saw the agents of this house in town this morning, and they tell me it is quite a first-class appointment for a mercantile one. I hope Maria will not dislike to go."

They sat there conversing until the sun had set. George pointed out to his brother's notice that the air was getting cold, but Thomas only smiled in answer: it was not the night air, hot or cold, that could any longer affect Thomas Godolphin. But he said that he might as well go in, and took George's arm to help his feeble steps.

"Is no one at home?" inquired George, finding the usual sitting-room empty.

"They are at Lady Godolphin's," replied Thomas, alluding to his sisters.

"Bessy goes there for good next week, and certain arrangements have to be made, so they walked over this afternoon just before you came up."

George sat down. The finding his sisters absent was a relief: since the unhappy explosion, George had always felt as a guilty school-boy in the presence of Janet. He remained a short while, and then rose to depart. "I'll come up and see you in the morning, Thomas."

Was there any prevision of what the night would bring forth on the mind of Thomas Godolphin? It might be. He entwined in his the hands held out to him.

"God bless you, George! God bless you, and keep you always!" And a lump, not at all familiar to George Godolphin's throat, rose in it as he went out from the presence of his brother.

CHAPTER LXIII.

FOR THE LAST TIME; VERY FAINT.

It was one of those charmingly clear nights that bring a sensation of pleasure to the senses. Daylight could not be said to have quite faded, but the moon was up, its rays shining brighter and brighter with every departing moment of day. As George passed Lady Godolphin's Folly, Janet was coming from it.

He could not avoid her. I don't say he wished to do it, but he could not if he had wished it. They stood talking together for some time; on Thomas's estate; on this Calcutta prospect of George's, for Janet had heard something of it from Lord Averil, and she questioned him closely; on other subjects. It was growing quite night when Janet made a movement homewards, and George could do no less than attend her.

"I thought Bessy was with you," he remarked, as they walked along.

"She is remaining an hour or two longer with Lady Godolphin; but it was time I came home to Thomas. When do you say you must sail, George?"

"The beginning of the year. My salary will commence with the first of January, and I ought to be off that day. I don't know whether that will give Maria sufficient time for preparation."

"Sufficient time!" repeated Miss Godolphin. "Will she be wanting to take out a ship's cargo? I should think she might be ready in a tittle of it. Shall you take the child?"

"Oh yes," he hastily answered; "I could not go without the child. And I am sure Maria would not consent to be separated from her. I hope Maria will not object to going on her own score."

"Nonsense!" returned Janet. "She will have the sense to see that it is a remarkable piece of good fortune, far better than you had any right to expect. Let me recommend you to put by half the salary, George. It is a

very handsome one, and you may do it if you will. Take a lesson from the past."

"Yes," replied George, with a twitch of conscience. "I wonder if the climate will try Maria?"

"I judge that the change will be good for her in all ways," said Janet, emphatically. "Depend upon it, she will only be too thankful to turn her back on Prior's Ash. She'll not get strong as long as she stops in it, or so long as your prospects are uncertain, doing nothing as you are now. I can't make out, for my part, how you live."

"You might easily guess that I have been helped a little, Janet."

"By one that I would not be helped by if I were starving," severely rejoined Janet. "You allude, I presume, to Mr. Verrall."

George did allude to Mr. Verrall; but he avoided a direct answer. "All that I borrow I shall return," he said, "as soon as it is in my power to do so. It is not much: and it is given and received as a loan only. What do you think of Thomas?" he asked, willing to change the subject.

"I think——" Janet stopped. Her voice died away into an awe-struck whisper, and finally ceased. They had taken the path home round by the ash-trees. The Dark Plain lay stretched before them, clear and shadowy (but that must seem a contradiction) in the moonlight. In the brightest night the gorse-bushes, with their shade, gave the place a shadowy weird-like appearance,—but never had the moonlight on the plain been clearer, whiter, brighter than it was now. And the Shadow?"

The ominous Shadow of Ashlydyat lay there: the Shadow which had clung to the fortunes of the Godolphins, as tradition said, in past ages; which had certainly followed the present race. But the dark blackness that had characterized it was unobservable now; the Shadow was undoubtedly there, but had eyes been looking on it less accustomed to its form than were Miss Godolphin's they might have

failed to make out distinctly its outlines. It was of a light, faint hue; more as the shadow of the Shadow, if I may so express it.

"George! do you notice?" she breathed.

"I see it," he answered.

"But do you notice its peculiarity,—its faint appearance? I should say,—I should say that it is indeed going from us; that it must be about the last time it will follow the Godolphins. With the wresting from them of Ashlydyat the curse was to spend itself."

She had sat down on the bench underneath the ash-trees, and was speaking in a low, dreamy tone: but George heard every word, and the topic was not particularly palatable to him. He could not but remember that it was he and no other who had been the cause of the wresting from them of Ashlydyat.

"Your brother will not be here long," murmured Janet. "That's the warning for the last chief of the Godolphins."

"Oh, Janet! I wish you were not so superstitious! Of course we know—it is patent to us all—that Thomas cannot last long: a few days, a few hours even, may close his life. Why should you connect with him that wretched Shadow?"

"I know what I know, and I have seen what I have seen," was the reply of Janet, spoken slowly,—nay, solemnly. "It is no wonder that *you* wish to ignore it, to affect to disbelieve in it: but you can do neither the one nor the other, George Godolphin."

George gave no answering argument. It may be that he felt he had forfeited the right to argue with Janet. She again broke the silence.

"I have watched and watched; but never once, since the day that those horrible misfortunes fell, has that Shadow appeared. I thought it had gone for good; I thought that our ruin, that the passing of Ashlydyat into the possession of strangers, was the working out of the curse. But it

seems it has come again,—for the last, final time, as I believe. And it is but in accordance with the past, that the type of the curse should come to shadow forth the death of the last Godolphin."

"You are complimentary to me, Janet," cried George, good-humoredly. "When poor Thomas shall have gone, I shall be here still, the last of the Godolphins."

"*You!*" returned Janet, and her tone of scornful contempt, unconscious as she might herself be of it, brought a sting to George's mind, a flush to his brow. "You might have been worthy of the name of Godolphin once, laddie, but that's over. The last true Godolphin dies out with Thomas."

"How long are you going to sit here?" asked George, after a time, as she gave no signs of moving.

"You need not wait," returned Janet. "I am at home now, as may be said. Don't stay, George: I would rather you did not: your wife must be expecting you."

Glad enough to be released, George went on his way, and Janet sat on, alone. With that Shadow before her,—though no longer a dark one,—it was impossible but that her reflections should be turned back on the unhappy past. She lost herself in a maze of perplexity,—as all must do whose thoughts roam to things "beyond their ken." Why should this fate have overtaken the Godolphin family,—the precise fate predicted for it ages ago? Why should that strange and never-to-be-accounted-for Shadow appear on the eve of evil? *Could they not have gone from their fate?*—not have escaped it by any means? It seemed but a trifling thing to do for George Godolphin, to keep in the right path, instead of lapsing to the wrong one: it seemed a more trifling thing still for Sir George Godolphin to do,—to quit his inheritance, Ashlydyat, for the Folly; yet upon that pivot events seemed to have turned. As it had been foretold (so ran the prediction) ages before: When the

chief of Ashlydyat should quit Ashlydyat, the ruin of the Godolphins would be near. And it had proved so. "Eh me!" wailed out Janet, in her sore anguish, "we are blaming George for it all; but perhaps the lad could not go against the fate. Who knows?"

Who knew, indeed! Let us look back to some of the ruin we have witnessed, and marvel, as Janet Godolphin did, whether those whom we blame as its cause, *could* have "gone against their fate." There are mysteries in this world which we cannot solve: we may lose ourselves as we will in their depths,—we may cast ridicule to them, or pass them over with a light laugh of irony,—we may talk, in our poor inflated wisdom, of their being amenable to common laws, to be accounted for by ordinary rules of science,—but we can never solve them, never fathom them, until Time shall be no more.

A great deal of this story, The Shadow of Ashlydyat, is a perfectly true one; it is but the recital of a drama of real life. And the superstition that encompasses it? ten thousand inquisitive tongues will ask. Yes, and the superstition. There are things, as I have just said, which can neither be explained nor accounted for: they are marvels, mysteries, and so they must remain. Many a family has its supernatural skeleton, religiously believed in; many a house has its one dread corner which has never been fully unclosed to the bright light of day. Say what men will to the contrary, there is a tendency in the human mind to allow the in-creeping of superstition. We cannot shut our eyes to things that occur within their view, although we may be, and always shall be, unable to explain them,—what they are, where they spring from, why they come. If I were to tell you that I believe there are such things as omens, warnings, which come to us,—though seldom are they sufficiently marked at the time to be attended to,—I should be set down as a visionary day-dreamer.

I am nothing of the sort: I have my share of plain common-sense, I pass my time in working, not in dreaming: I never had the gratification of seeing a ghost yet, and I wish I was as sure of a thousand pounds *cadeau* coming to me this moment, as I am that I never shall see one; I have not been taken into favor by the spirits, have never been promoted to so much as half a message from them,—and never expect to be. But some curious incidents have forced themselves on my life's experience, causing me to echo as a question the assertion of the Prince of Denmark: Are there more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy?

Janet Godolphin rose with a deep sigh and her weight of care. She kept her head turned to the Shadow until she had passed from its view, and then continued her way to the house, murmuring, "It's but a little misfortune; it's but a little misfortune: the shade is not much darker than the moonlight itself."

Thomas was in his arm-chair, bending forward towards the fire, as she entered. His face would have been utterly colorless, save for the bluish tinge which had settled there, a tinge distinguishable even in the red blaze. Janet, keen-sighted as Margery, thought the hue had grown more ominous since she quitted him in the afternoon.

"Have you come back alone?" asked Thomas, turning towards her.

George accompanied me as far as the ash-trees: I met him. Bessy is staying on for an hour with Lady Godolphin. Have you had your medicine, Thomas?"

"Yes."

Janet drew a chair near to him, and sat down, glancing almost stealthily at him. When this ominous look appears on the human face, we do not like to gaze into it too boldly, lest its owner, so soon to be called away, may read the fiat in our own dread countenance. Janet need not have feared its effects, had he done so, on Thomas Godolphin.

"It is a fine night," he observed.

"It is," replied Janet. "Thomas," dropping her voice, "the Shadow is abroad."

"Ah!"

The response was spoken in no tone of dread, of dismay; but calmly, pleasantly, with a smile upon his lips.

"It has changed its color," continued Janet, "and may be called gray now, instead of black. I thought it had left us for good, Thomas; I suppose it had to come once more."

"If it cared to keep up its character for consistency," he said, his voice a jesting one. "If it has been the advance herald of the death of other Godolphins, why should it not herald in mine?"

"I did not think to hear you joke about the Shadow," observed Janet, after a pause of vexation.

"Nay, there's no harm done. I have never understood it, you know, Janet; none of us have: so little have we understood, that we have not known whether to believe or disbelieve. A short while, Janet, and things may be made plainer to me."

"How are you feeling to-night?" somewhat abruptly asked Janet.

"Never better of late days. It seems as if ease, both of mind and body, had come to me. I think," he added, after a few moments' reflection, "that what George tells me of a prospect opening for him has imparted this sense of ease. I have thought of him a great deal, Janet, of his wife and child: of what would become of him and of them."

"And it has been troubling you, I conclude!" remarked Janet, with a touch of her old severe accent. "He is not worth it, Thomas."

"May God help him on now!" murmured Thomas Godolphin. "He may live yet to be a comfort to his family; to repair to others some of the injury he has caused. Oh, Janet! I am ready to go."

Janet turned her eyes from the fire, that the tears rising in them might not be seen to glisten. "The Shadow

was very light, Thomas," she repeated. "Whatever it may herald forth will not be much of a misfortune."

"A misfortune!—to be taken to my rest!—to the good God who has so loved and kept me here! A few minutes before you came in, I fell into a doze, and I dreamt I saw Jesus Christ standing there by the window, waiting for me. He had his hand stretched out to me with a smile. So vivid had been the impression, that when I woke, I thought it was reality—and I got up, and was hastening towards the window before I recollected myself. Death a misfortune! No, Janet; not for me."

Janet rang the bell for lights to be brought in. Thomas, his elbow resting on the arm of the chair, bent his head upon his hand, and became lost in the imagination of glories that might so soon open to him. Bright forms were flitting around a throne of wondrous beauty, golden harps in their hands; and in one of them, her harp idle, her radiant face turned as if watching for one who might be coming, he seemed to recognize Ethel!

A misfortune for the good to die!
No, no.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE BELL THAT RANG OUT ON THE EVENING AIR.

GEORGE GODOLPHIN sat with his wife and child. The room was bright with light and fire, and George's spirits were bright in accordance with it. He had been enlarging upon the prospect offered to him, describing a life in India in vivid colors; had drawn some imaginative pen-and-ink sketches of Miss Meta on a camel's back; in a gorgeous palanquin; in an open terrace-gallery, being fanned by about fifty slaves, the young lady herself looking on in a high state of excitement, her eyes sparkling, her cheeks burning. Maria seemed to be partaking of the gen-

eral hilarity; whether she was really better, or the unexpected return of her husband had infused into her artificial strength, unwonted excitement, certain it is that she was not looking very ill that night: her cheeks had borrowed some of Meta's color, and her lips were parted with a smile at George's words, or at Meta's ecstasies. The child's tongue was never still; it was papa this, papa the other, incessantly. Margery felt rather cross, and when she came in to add some dish to the substantial tea she had prepared for her master, told him she hoped he'd not be for carrying Miss Meta out to them wretched foreign places that was only good for convicts. India and Botany Bay ranked precisely alike in the mind of Margery.

But the tea was done with and removed, and the evening had gone on, and Margery had come again to escort Miss Meta to bed. Miss Meta was not in a hurry to be escorted. Her nimble feet were flying everywhere,—from papa at the table, to mamma, who sat on the sofa near the fire; from mamma to Margery, standing silent and grim, scarcely deigning to look at the pen-and-ink sketches that Meta exhibited to her.

"I don't see no sense in 'em, for my part," slightly spoke Margery, regarding with dubious eyes one somewhat indistinct representation held up to her. "Them things hain't like Christian animals. A elephant, d'ye call it? Which is its head, and which is its tail?"

Meta whisked off to her papa, elephant in hand. "Papa, which is its head, and which is its tail?"

"That's its tail," said George. "You'll know its head from its tail when you come to ride one, Margery," cried he, throwing his laughing glance at the woman.

"Me ride a elephant! me mount upon one o' them beasts!" was the indignant response. "I'd like to see myself at it! It might be just as well, sir, if you didn't talk about 'em to the child: I shall have her start out of her sleep screaming to-night,

fancying that a score of 'em's eating her up."

George laughed. Meta's busy brain was at work; very busy, very blithe-some just then.

"Papa, do we have swings in India?"

"Lots of them," responded George.

"Do they go up to the trees? Are they as good as the one Mrs. Pain had made for me at the Folly?"

"Ten times better than that," said George, slightly. "That was a muff of a swing, compared to what the others will be."

Meta considered. "You didn't see it, papa. It went up—up—oh, ever so high."

"Did it," said George. "We'll send the others higher."

"Who'll swing me?" continued Meta. "Mrs. Pain? She had used to swing me before. Will she go to India with us?"

"Not she," said George. "What should she go for? Look here. Here's Meta on an elephant, and Margery on another, in attendance behind."

He had been mischievously sketching it off: Meta on the elephant, sitting at her ease, her dainty little legs astride, boy-fashion, was rather a pretty sight: but poor Margery grasping hold of the elephant's body and trunk, her face one picture of horror in her fear of falling, and some half-dozen natives propping her up on either side, was only a ludicrous one.

Margery looked daggers, but nothing could exceed the delight of Meta. "Draw mamma upon one, papa; make her elephant along-side me."

"Draw mamma upon one?" repeated George. "I think we'll have mamma in a palanquin; the elephants shall be reserved for you and Margery."

"Is she coming to bed to-night, or isn't she?" demanded Margery, in an uncommonly sharp tone, speaking for the benefit of the company generally, not to anybody in particular.

Meta paid little attention; George

appeared to pay less. In taking his knife from his waistcoat-pocket to cut the pencil, preparatory to "drawing mamma and the palanquin," he happened to bring forth a ring. Those quick little eyes saw it; they saw most things. "That's Uncle Thomas's!" cried the child.

In his somewhat hasty essay to return it to his pocket, George let the ring fall to the ground, and it rolled towards Margery. She picked it up wonderingly—almost fearfully; she had believed that Mr. Godolphin would not part with his signet-ring during life: the ring which he had offered to the bankruptcy commissioners, and they, with every token of respect, had returned to him.

"Oh, master! Surely he is not dead!"

"Dead!" echoed George, looking at her in surprise. "I left him better than usual, Margery, when I came away."

Margery said no more. Meta was not so scrupulous. "Uncle Thomas always has that on his fingers: he seals his letters with it. Why have you brought it away, papa?"

"He does not want it to seal letters with any longer, Meta," George answered, speaking gravely now, and stroking her golden curls. "I shall use it in future for sealing mine."

"Who'll wear it?" asked Meta. "You or Uncle Thomas?"

"I shall—some time. But it is quite time Meta was in bed; and Margery looks as if she thought so. There! just a few of mamma's grapes, and away to dream of elephants."

Some fine white grapes were heaped up on a plate on the table: they were what George had brought from London for his wife. He broke some off for Meta, and that spoiled young damsel climbed on his knee while she devoured them, chattering incessantly.

"Will there be parrots in India? Red ones?"

"Plenty. Red and green and blue and yellow," returned George, who was rather magnificent in his promises.

"There'll be monkeys as well—as Margery's fond of them."

Margery flung herself off in a temper. But the words had brought a recollection to Meta: she scuffled up on her knees, neglecting her grapes, gazing at her papa in consternation.

"Uncle Reginald was to bring me home some monkeys and some parrots and a Chinese dog that won't bite: how shall I have them, papa, if I'm gone to Cal—what is it?" She spoke better than she did, and could sound the "th" now; but the name of the Hindostan presidency was difficult to be remembered.

"Calcutta. We'll write word to Regy's ship to come round there and leave them," replied ready George.

It satisfied the child. She finished her grapes, and then George took her in his arms to Maria to be kissed, and afterwards put her down outside the door to offend Margery, after kissing lovingly her pretty lips and her golden curls.

His manner had changed when he returned. He stood at the fire, near Maria, grave and earnest, and began talking more seriously to her on this new project than he had done in the presence of the child.

"I think I should do wrong were I to refuse it; do not you, Maria? It is an offer that is not often met with."

"Yes, I think you would do wrong to refuse it. It is far better than any thing I had hoped for."

"And can you be ready to start by New Year's-day?"

"I—I could be ready, of course," she answered. "But I—I—don't know whether——"

She came to a final stop. George looked at her in surprise: in addition to her hesitation, he detected considerable emotion.

She stood up by him and leaned her arm on the mantlepiece. She strove to speak quietly, to choke down the rebellious rising in her throat: her breath went and came, her bosom was heaving. "George, I am not sure

whether I shall be able to undertake the voyage. I am not sure that I shall live to go."

Did his heart beat a shade quicker? He looked at her, more in surprise still than in any other feeling. He had not in the least realized this faint suggestion of the future.

"My darling, what do you mean?"

He had passed his arm round her waist and drawn her to him. Maria let her head fall upon his shoulder, and the tears began to trickle down her wasted cheeks.

"I cannot get strong, George. I get weaker instead of stronger; and I begin to think I shall never be well again. I begin to know that I shall never be well again!" she added, amending the words: "I have thought it some time."

"How do you feel?" he asked, breaking the silence that had ensued. "Are you in any pain?"

"I have had a pain in my throat ever since the—ever since the summer; and I have a constant inward pain here"—touching her chest. "Mr. Snow says both arise from the same cause—nervousness; but I don't know."

"Maria," he said, his voice quite trembling with its tenderness, "shall I tell you what it is? The worry of the past summer has had a bad effect upon you and brought you into this low, weak state. Mr. Snow is right: it is nervousness: and you must have change of scene ere you can recover. Is he attending you?"

"He calls every other day or so, and he sends me medicine of different kinds; tonics, I fancy. I wish I could get strong! I might—perhaps—get a little better, that is, I might feel a trifle better, if I were not always so entirely alone. I wish," she more timidly added, "that you could be with me more than you are."

"You cannot wish it so heartily as I," returned George. "A little while, my darling, and things will be bright again. I have been earnestly and constantly seeking for something to do in London, and was obliged to be

there. Now that I have this place given me, I must be there still chiefly until we sail, making my preparations. You can come to me if you like, until we do go," he added, "if you would rather be there than here. I can change my bachelor lodgings, and get a place large enough for you and Meta."

She felt that she was not equal to the removal, and she felt that if she really were to leave Europe she must remain this short intervening time near her father and mother. But—even as she thought it—the conviction came upon her, firm and strong, that she never should leave it; should not live to leave it. George's voice, eager and hopeful, interrupted.

"We shall begin life anew in India, Maria: with the old country we shall quit old sores. As to Margery—I don't know what's to be done about her. It would half break her heart to drag her to a new land, and quite break it to carry off Meta from her. Perhaps we had better not attempt to influence her either way, but let the decision rest entirely with her."

"She will never face the live elephants," said Maria, her lips smiling at the joke, as she endeavored to be gay and hopeful as George was. But the effort utterly failed. A vision came over her of George there *alone*; herself in the cold grave, whither she believed she was surely hastening; Meta—ay, what of Meta?

"Oh, George! if I might but get strong! if I might but live to go!" she cried, in a wail of agony.

"Hush, hush! Maria, hush! I must not scold you; but indeed it is not right to give way to these low spirits. That of itself will keep you back. Shall I take you up to town with me now, to-morrow, just for a week's change? I know it would partially bring you round, and we'd make shift in my rooms for the time. Margery will take care of Meta here."

She knew how worse than useless was the thought of attempting it; she saw that George could not be brought to understand her excessive weakness.

A faint hope came across her that, now that the uncertainty of his future prospects was removed, she might grow better. That uncertainty had been distressing her sick heart for months.

She subdued her emotion and sat down in the chair quietly, saying that she was not strong enough to go up with him this time: it would be a change in one sense for her, she added, the thinking of the new life; and then she began to talk of other things.

"Did you see Reginald before he sailed?"

"Not immediately before it, I think."

"You are aware that he has gone as common seaman."

"Yes. By the way, there's no knowing what I may be able to do for Regy out there. And for Isaac too, perhaps. Once I am in a good position I shall be able to assist them—and I'll do it. Regy hates the sea: I'll get him something more to his taste in Calcutta."

Maria's face flushed with hope, and she clasped her nervous hands together. "If you could, George! how thankful I should be! I think of poor Regy and his hard life night and day."

"Which is not good for you by any means, young lady. I wish you'd get out of that habit of thinking and fretting about others. It has been just poor Thomas's fault."

She answered by a faint smile.

"Has Thomas given you his ring?" she asked.

"He gave it me this afternoon," replied George, taking it from his pocket. It was a ring with a bright green stone, on which was engraved the arms of the Godolphins. Sir George had worn it always, and it came to Thomas at his death: now it had come to George.

"You do not wear it, George."

"Not yet. I cannot bear to put it on my finger while Thomas lives. In point of fact, I have no right to do so—at least, to use the signet: it pertains exclusively to the head of the Godolphins."

"Do you see Mrs. Pain often?" Ma-

ria presently said, with apparent indifference. But George little knew the fluttering emotion that had been working within, or the effort it had taken to subdue it ere the question could be put.

"I see her sometimes; not often. She gets me to ride with her in the Park now and then."

"Does she intend to continue to reside with the Verralls?"

"I suppose so. I have not heard her mention any thing about it."

"George, I have often wondered where Mrs. Pain's money comes from," Maria resumed, in a dreamy tone. "It was said in the old days, you know, that the report of her having thirty thousand pounds' fortune was false; that she had none."

"I don't believe she had a penny," returned George. "As to her income, I fancy it is drawn from Verrall. Mrs. Pain's husband was connected in some business-way with Verrall, and perhaps she still benefits. I know nothing whatever, but I have often thought it must be so. Hark! Listen!"

George raised his hand as he abruptly spoke, for a distant sound had broken upon his ear. Springing to the window he threw it open. The death-bell of All Souls' was booming out over Prior's Ash.

Before a word was spoken by him or by his wife; before George could still the emotion that was thumping at his heart, Margery came in with a scared face: in her flurry, her sudden grief, she addressed him as she had been accustomed to address him in his boyhood.

"Do you hear it, Master George? That's the passing-bell! It is for *him*. There's nobody else within ten miles that they'd trouble to have the bell tolled for at nigh ten o'clock at night. The master of Ashlydyat's gone."

She sat down on a chair, regardless of the presence of her master and mistress, and flinging her apron over her face, burst into a storm of sobs.

A voice in the passage outside aroused her, for she recognized it as

Bexley's. George opened the room door, and the old man came in.

"It is all over, sir," he said, his manner strangely still, his voice unnaturally calm and low, as is sometimes the case where emotion is striven to be suppressed. "Miss Janet bade me come to you with the tidings."

George's bearing was suspiciously quiet too. "It is very sudden, Bexley," he presently rejoined.

Maria had risen and stood with one hand leaning on the table, her eyes strained on Bexley, her white face turned to him. Margery never moved.

"Very sudden, sir: and yet my mistress did not seem unprepared for it. He took his tea with her and was so cheerful and well over it, that I declare I began to hope he had taken a fresh turn. Soon afterwards Miss Bessy came back, and I heard her laughing in the room as she told them some story that had been related to her by Lady Godolphin. Presently my mistress called me in, to give me directions about a little matter she wanted done to-morrow, and while she was speaking to me, Miss Bessy cried out. We turned round and saw her leaning over my master. He had slipped back in his chair powerless, and I hastened to raise and support him. Death was in his face, sir; there was no mistaking it; but he was quite conscious, quite sensible, and smiled at us. 'I must say farewell to you,' he said, and Miss Bessy burst into a fit of sobs; but my mistress kneeled down quietly before him, and took his hands in hers, and said, 'Thomas, is the moment come?' 'Yes, it is come,' he answered, and he tried to look round at Miss Bessy, who stood a little behind his chair. 'Don't grieve,' he said, 'I am going on first,' but she only sobbed the more. 'Good-by, my dear ones,' he continued; 'good-by, Bexley; I shall wait for you all, as I know I am being waited for. Fear?' he went on, for Miss Bessy sobbed out something that sounded like the word, 'fear, when I am going to God!—when I saw Jesus—Jesus——'"

Bexley fairly broke down with a great burst, and the tears were rolling silently over Maria's cheeks. George wheeled round to the window and stood there with his back to them. Presently Bexley mastered himself and resumed: Margery had come forward then and taken her apron from before her eyes.

"It was the last word he spoke, 'Jesus.' His voice ceased, his hands fell, and the eyelids dropped. There was no struggle; nothing but a long gentle breath; and he died with the smile upon his lips."

"He had cause to smile," interjected Margery, the words coming from her in jerks. "If ever a man has gone to his rest in heaven it is Mr. Godolphin. He had more than his share of sorrow in this world, and God has took him to a better."

Every feeling in George's heart echoed to the words,—every pulse beat in wild sorrow for the death of his good brother,—every sting that remorse could bring pricked him with the consciousness of his own share in it. He thrust his burning face beyond the window into the cool night; he raised his eyes to the blue canopy of heaven, serene and fair in the moonlight, almost as if he saw in imagination the redeemed soul winging its flight thither. He pressed his hands upon his throbbing breast to still its emotion; but for the greatest exercise of self-control he would have burst into sobs, as Bexley had done; and it may be that he; he, careless George Godolphin; breathed forth a yearning cry to Heaven to be pardoned his share of the past. If Thomas, in his changed condition, could look down upon him, now, with his loving eyes, his ever-forgiving spirit, he would know how bitter and genuine, how full of anguish were these regrets!

George leaned his head on the side of the window to subdue his emotion, to gather the outward calmness that man likes not to have ruffled before the world; he listened to the strokes of the passing-bell, ringing out so

sharply in the still night air: and every separate stroke was laden with its weight of pain.

CHAPTER LXV.

THE SHUTTERS CLOSED AT PRIOR'S ASH.

You might have taken it to be Sunday in Prior's Ash,—save that Sundays in ordinary do not look so gloomy. The shops were shut, a drizzling rain came down, and the heavy bell of All Souls' was booming out at solemn intervals. It was tolling for the funeral of Thomas Godolphin. Morning and night, from eight o'clock to nine, had it so tolled since his death; but on this, the last day, it did not cease with nine o'clock, but tolled on, and would so toll until he should be in his last home. People had closed their shutters with one accord as the clock struck ten; some, indeed, had never opened them at all: if they had not paid him due respect always in life, they paid it him in death. Ah, it was only for a time, in the first brunt of the shock, that Prior's Ash mistook Thomas Godolphin. He had gone to his long home,—to his last resting-place: he had gone to the merciful God to whom (it may surely be said!) he had belonged in life; and Prior's Ash mourned for him as for a brother.

You will deem this a sad story,—perhaps bring a reproach upon me for recording such. That bell has tolled out all too often in its history; and this is not the first funeral you have seen at All Souls'. If I wrote only according to my own experiences of life, my stories would be always sad ones. Life wears different aspects for us, and its cares and its joys are unequally allotted out. At least, they so appear to be. One glances up heavily from the burdens heaped upon him, and sees others without care basking in the sunshine. But I often wonder whether those who seem so gay, whose path seems to be cast on

the broad, sunshiny road of pleasure,—whether they have not a skeleton in *their* closet. I look, I say, and wonder, marveling what the reality may be. Nothing but gayety, nothing but lightness, nothing, to all appearance, but freedom from care. Is it really so? Perhaps, with some,—a very few. Is it well for those few? A man to whom God gave more than earthly wisdom has said for our profit that sorrow is better than laughter; that the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, and the living will lay it to his heart. The broad, sunshiny road of pleasure, down which so many seem to travel, is not the safest road to a longer home or the best preparation for it. Oh, if we could but see the truth when the burden upon us is heavy and long!—when we glance into the world at the light and free, and are tempted to wail out our rebellious complaint, “Lord, is it just that this should be laid upon me?—why cannot they, who seem to have only joy dealt out for their portion, help to bear their share of the burden?” Fellow-sufferers, if we could but read that burden aright, we should see how good it is, and bless the hand that sends it.

But we never can. We are but mortal; born with a mortal's keen susceptibility to care and pain. We preach to others that these things are sent for their good; we complaisantly say so to ourselves when not actually suffering; but when the fiery trial is upon us, then we groan out in our sore anguish that it is greater than we can bear.

There is no doubt that, with the many, suffering predominates in life, and if we would paint life as it is, that suffering must form a comprehensive view in the picture. Reverses, sickness, death,—they seem to follow some people as surely as that the shadow follows the sun at noontide. It is probable—nay, it is certain—that minds are so constituted as to receive them differently. Witness, as a case in point, the contrast in Thomas Godolphin and his brother George.

Thomas, looking back, could say that nearly his whole course of life had been marked by sorrow,—some of its sources have been mentioned here,—not all. There was the peculiarly melancholy death of Ethel; there was the long-felt disease which marked him for its early prey; there was the dread crash, the disgrace, which nearly broke his heart. It is true he felt these things more than many would have felt them; but I think it is to those who feel them most that sorrows chiefly come.

And George? Look at him. Gay, light, careless, handsome George? What sorrows had marked *his* path? None. He had revelled in the world's favor, he had made a wife of the woman he loved, he had altogether floated gayly down the sunniest part of the stream of life. The worry which his folly had brought upon himself, and which ended in his own ruin and in the ruin of so many others, *he* had not felt. No, he had scarcely felt it: and once let him turn his back on England and enter upon new scenes, he will barely remember it.

Yes, this is a sad story, and some of you, my readers, may feel inclined to blame me,—to say I might have made it merrier. According to your experiences, as they shall have lain on the sunny or the shady side of life, so will you judge it. How *true* it will be to some, let them tell. I could relate to you many of actual life far more sorrowful than this. But take courage,—take courage, you who are well-nigh wearied out! Remember it is on earth's battle-field that heaven's crown is won.

All Souls' clock struck eleven, and the headle came out of the church and threw wide the gates. It was very punctual, for there came the hearse in sight,—punctual as he, who was borne within it, had in life always liked to be. Prior's Ash peeped out through the chinks of its shutters, behind its blinds and its curtains, to see the sight, as it came slowly winding along the street to the sound of the solemn bell. Through the mist of blinding

tears which rolled down many a face did Prior's Ash look out. They might have attended him to the grave, following unobtrusively, but that it was known to be the wish of the family that such demonstration should not be made: so they contented themselves with shutting up their houses, and observing the day as one of mourning. "Bury me in the plainest and simplest manner possible," had been Thomas Godolphin's directions when the end was drawing near. Under the circumstances, it was only seemly to do so: but so antagonistic were pomp and show of all kinds to the tastes of Thomas Godolphin, in all things that related to himself, that it is more than probable the same orders would have been given had he died as his forefathers had died,—the master of Ashlydyat, the wealthy chief of the Godolphins.

So a hearse and a mourning-coach were all that had been commanded to Ashlydyat. What means, then, this pageantry of carriages that follow? Fine carriages, gay with colors, as they file past, one by one, the strained eyes of Prior's Ash, some of them with coronets on their panels, all with closed blinds, a long line of them. Lady Godolphin's is first, taking its place next the black mourning-coach. They have come from the various parts of the county, near and distant, to show their owners' homage to that good man who had earned their deepest respect during life. Willingly, willingly would those owners have attended and mourned him in person, but for the same motive which kept away the more humble inhabitants of Prior's Ash. Slowly the procession gained the churchyard-gate, and the hearse and the mourning-coach stopped at it: the rest of the carriages filed off and turned their horses' heads to face the churchyard, and waited still and quiet while the hearse was emptied. Out of the mourning-coach stepped two mourners only: George Godolphin and the Viscount Averil.

The rector of All Souls' stood at the gate in his surplice, book in hand.

He turned, reciting the commencement of the service for the burial of the dead: "I am the resurrection and the life." With measured steps, slowly following, went those who bore the coffin, their heads covered with the velvet pall. George Godolphin and Lord Averil came next, their white handkerchiefs held to their faces, and behind them, having fallen in at the gate, was Bexley, with a man named Andrew, a time-honored servant of Ashlydyat, but attached to Lady Godolphin's household now. Thus they entered the church.

Ere the rector reappeared again, book in hand still, but not reading from it, the churchyard had grown pretty full. By ones, by twos, by threes, they had been coming in, regardless of the weather, to see the last of the master of Ashlydyat. The beadle was lenient to-day. The beadle felt rather cowed down himself; for, one of the very few personages whom that self-important functionary had allowed himself to respect, because he could not help it, was Mr. Godolphin; and when a man feels his own spirit sad, he has no spirits to lord it over others. So the churchyard had filled, and the beadle had quietly allowed the innovation, and was publicly avowing to certain friends of his, within hearing, that he couldn't ha' felt more, had it been a son of his own, nor he did for Mr. Godolphin.

The rector of All Souls' took his place at the head of the grave and read the service, as the coffin was lowered. George stood next to him; close to George, Lord Averil; and the other mourners were clustered beyond. Their faces were bent; the drizzling rain beat down upon their bare heads. Many a creditor of the bank, who had suffered severely, had stolen up to take part thus silently in the service. Perhaps they had done it in the light of a peace-offering,—a sort of something that might rest soothingly upon their consciences; an atonement for the harsh words they had once lavished on Thomas Godol-

phin. Mr. Snow also had come up; unable to attend earlier, he came stealing now at the last, just as George had stolen up years before at the funeral of Ethel Grame. It was a notable contrast, the simple ceremony of to-day and the grand parade which had been made the last time a Godolphin was interred,—Sir George. But the men, dead, were different, and circumstances had changed.

Did the rector of All Souls', standing there with his pale severe face, his sonorous voice echoing over the graves, recall those back funerals, when he, over whom the service was now being read, had stood as chief mourner? No doubt he did. Did George recall them? The rector glanced at him once, and saw that he had a difficulty in suppressing his emotion. This was the first time he and George had met since the crash had come. How did George feel as he stood there, between the two men whom he had so wronged? Did he envy Thomas Godolphin in his coffin? *He* had escaped from the turmoil of the world's care and had gone to his rest,—to his rest, if ever dead man had in this world.

"I heard a voice from Heaven, saying unto me, Write, From henceforth blessed are the dead which die in the Lord: even so saith the Spirit; for they rest from their labors."

So hushed was the silence, that every word, as it fell solemnly from the lips of the minister, might be heard to all parts of the churchyard. If ever that verse could apply to frail humanity, with its unceasing struggle after holiness and its unceasing failure *here*, it most surely applied to him over whom it was being spoken. How *did* George Godolphin feel? Surely it was an ordeal to him to stand there before those men whom he had injured, over the good brother whom he had helped to send to the grave! His head was bowed, his face hidden in his handkerchief; the drops of rain pattered down on his golden hair. He had gone to his grave so early! Bend forward, as so

many of those spectators are doing, and read the inscription on the plate. There's a little earth on the coffin, but the plate is visible. "Thomas Godolphin of Ashlydyat: aged forty-five years."

Only forty-five years! A period at which some men think they are but beginning life. It seemed to be an untimely death; and it would have been, after all his pain and sorrow, but that he had entered upon a better life. Some of those, left to live on, might envy him now. Could they, in their thoughtful reflection, have wished, now that it was over, that one sorrow had been lightened for him, one pang removed? No; for God had but been fitting him for that better life; and it is only those who have drunk here of their full cup of sorrow that are eager to enter upon it.

They left him in the vaulted grave, the last Godolphin of Ashlydyat, his coffin resting near his mother's, who lay beside Sir George. Was that vault destined to be opened shortly again? In truth, it was little worth while to close it.

The spectators began to draw unobtrusively away, silently and decently. In the general crowd and bustle, for everybody seemed to be on the move, George turned suddenly to the rector and held out his hand. "Will you shake hands with me, Mr. Hastings?"

There was a perceptible hesitation on the rector's part, not in the least sought to be disguised, ere he responded to it, and then he put his own hand into the one held out. "I cannot do otherwise over the dead body of your brother," was the answer. "But neither can I be a hypocrite, George Godolphin, and say that I forgive you, for it would not be true. The result of the injury you did me presses daily and hourly upon us in a hundred ways, and my mind as yet has refused to be brought into that charitable frame, necessary to entire forgiveness. This is not altogether the fault of my will. I wish

to forgive you for your wife's sake and for my own; I pray night and morning that I may be enabled heartily to forgive you before I die. I would not be your enemy; I wish you well—and there's my hand in token of it: but to pronounce forgiveness is not yet in my power. Will you call in and see Mrs. Hastings?"

"I shall not have time to-day. I must go back to London this evening, but I shall be down again very shortly, and will see her then. It was a peaceful ending."

George was gazing down dreamily at the coffin, as he spoke the last words. The rector looked at him.

"A peaceful ending! Yes. It could not be any thing else with *him*."

"No, no," murmured George. "Not any thing else with *him*."

"May God in His mercy send us all as happy a one, when our time shall come!"

As the words left the rector's lips, the loud and heavy bell boomed out again, giving notice to Prior's Ash that the last rites were over, that the world had closed forever on Thomas Godolphin.

CHAPTER LXVI.

CAUGHT BY MR. SNOW.

"OH, George! *can't* you stay with me!"

The words broke from Maria with a wail of anguish as she rose to bid her husband good-by. He was hastening away to catch the evening-train. It seemed that she had not liked to prefer the request before, had put it off to the last moment. In point of fact, she had seen but little of George all day. After the funeral he had returned in the coach with Lord Averil to Ashlydyat, and only came home late in the afternoon.

Lord and Lady Averil, recalled so suddenly from their wedding-tour, had reached Ashlydyat the previous

night, and would not leave it again. Janet was to depart from it in a few days; Bessy would be on the morrow with Lady Godolphin. It was the last time they, the brother and the two sisters, would be together,—certainly for years, perhaps forever; and George could not in decency hasten away. There were many things to say, various little personal mementoes of Thomas to be divided. Maria had been requested to spend that last day at Ashlydyat, and had promised; but in the morning she was attacked with faintness and sickness,—as she had been two or three times lately,—and was unable to leave her bed.

She grew better in the after part of the day, and was up and looking herself again when George came home at dusk. Certainly her face was unusually pale, but, if George cast a thought to that paleness, it was only to suppose it the reflection of her new black dress and its crape trimming. "Have but one dress of deep mourning; I will pay for it," Janet had considerably said to her. "But mourning will be the worst wear on board ship, and too hot and heavy for India."

There were other reasons, Maria thought in her own mind, why one dress would be sufficient for her,—that she should not live to require another. She did not speak of this feeling; she shrank from doing so. In the first place, she was not sure of this: the under-current of conviction of it lay so very deep in her heart that it was not always apparent to her. Now and then she had hinted it to George—that it might be. George would not by any means receive it; he partly reasoned, partly soothed her out of it; and he went privately to Mr. Snow, begged him to take all possible care of his wife, and asked whether there were really any grounds for alarm. Mr. Snow answered him much in the same terms that he had answered Margery to the like question,—that he could not say for certain: she was, no

doubt, very weak and poorly, but he saw no reason why she should not get out of it; and as for himself, he was taking of her all the care he could take. The reply satisfied George, and he became full of the projects and details of his departure, entering into them so warmly with her that Maria caught the spirit of enterprise, and was beguiled into a belief that she might yet go.

He had come home from the funeral bearing a parcel wrapped in paper for Meta. It had been found amidst Thomas Godolphin's things, directed to the child. George lifted Meta on his knee—very grave, very subdued was his face to-day—and untied it. It proved to be a Bible, and on the fly-leaf in his own hand was written, "Uncle Thomas's last and best gift to Meta," and it was dated the day he died. Lower down were the words, "My ways are ways of pleasantness, and all my paths are peace."

And the evening had gone on, and it grew time for George to go. It was as he bent to kiss his wife that she had burst out with that wailing cry. "Oh, George! can't you stay with me!"

"My darling, I must go. I shall soon be down again."

"Only a little while! A little longer!"

The tone in its anguish quite distressed him. "I would stay if it were possible; but it is not. I came down for a day only, you know, Maria, and I have remained more than a week. It will not be so very long before we sail, and I shall have my hands full with the preparations for our voyage."

"I have been so much alone," she hysterically sobbed. "I get thinking and thinking: it does not give me a chance to get well. George, you have been always away from me since the trouble came."

"I could not help it. Maria, I could not bear Prior's Ash; I *could* not stop in it," he cried, with a burst of genuine truth. "But for you and Thomas, I should never have set my foot within the place again, once I

was quit of it. Now, however, I am compelled to be in London; there are fifty things to see to. Keep up your courage, my darling! a little while, and we shall be together and happy as we used to be."

"Master," said Margery, putting her head in at the door, "do you want to catch the nine train?"

"All right," answered George.

"It may be all right if you run for it, it won't be all right else," grunted Margery.

He flew off, catching up his hand-portmanteau as he went, and waving his adieu to Meta. That young damsel, accustomed to be made a vast deal of, could not understand so summary and slighting a leave-taking, and she stood quite still in her consternation, staring after her papa,—or rather at the door he had gone out of. Margery was right, and George found that he must indeed hasten if he would save the train. Maria, with a storm of hysterical sobs, grievous to witness, caught Meta in her arms, sat down on the sofa, and sobbed over the child as she strained her to her bosom.

Meta was used to her mamma's grief now, and she lay quite still, her shoes and white socks peeping out beyond the black frock; nay, a considerable view of the straight little legs peeping out as well. Maria bent her head until her aching forehead rested on the fair and plump neck.

"Mamma! Mamma dear! Mamma's crying for poor Uncle Thomas!"

"No," said Maria, in the bitterness of her heart. "If we were but where Uncle Thomas is, we should be happy. I cry for us who are left, Meta."

"Hey-day! and what on earth's the meaning of this? Do you think this is the way to get strong, Mrs. George Godolphin?"

They had not heard him come in; Maria's sobs were loud. Meta, always ready for visitors, scuffed off her mamma's lap gleefully, and Mr. Snow drew a chair in front of Maria and watched her try to dry away her tears. He moved a little to the right, that the

light of the lamp which was behind him might fall upon her face.

"Now just you have the goodness to tell me what it is that's the matter."

"I—I am low spirited, I think," said Maria, her voice subdued and weak now.

"Low spirited!" echoed Mr. Snow. "Then I'd get high spirited if I were you. I wish there had never been such a thing as spirits invented, for my part! A nice excuse it is for you ladies to sigh and groan half your time, instead of being rational and merry, as you ought to be. A woman of your sense ought to be above it, Mrs. George Godolphin."

"Mr. Snow," interrupted a troublesome little voice, "papa's gone back to London. He went without saying good-by to Meta!"

"Ah! Miss Meta had been naughty, I expect."

Meta shook her head very decisively in the negative, but Mr. Snow had turned to Maria.

"And so you were crying after that roving husband of yours! I guessed as much. He nearly ran over me at the gate. 'Step in and see my wife, will you Snow?' said he. 'She wants tonics, or something.' You don't want tonics half as much as you want common sense, Mrs. George Godolphin."

"I am so weak," was her feeble excuse. "A little thing upsets me now."

"Well, and what can you expect? If I sat over my surgery fire all day stewing and fretting, a pretty fit doctor I should soon become for my patients! I wonder you——"

"Have you looked at my new black frock, Mr. Snow?"

She was a young lady that would be attended to, let who would go without attention. She had lifted up her white pinafore and stood in front of him, waiting for the frock to be admired.

"Very smart indeed!" replied Mr. Snow.

"It's not smart," spoke Meta, resentfully. "My smart frocks are put away in the drawers. It is for Uncle

Thomas, Mr. Snow! Mr. Snow, Uncle Thomas is in heaven now."

"Ay, child, that he is. And it's time that Miss Meta Godolphin was in bed."

More resentment. "I sat up because papa was going. He said I was to. Mr. Snow, Uncle Thomas has sent me a nice book,—a Bible. Mamma says I am never to forget to read in it night and morning; always, always; when she's gone to be with Uncle Thomas in heaven."

Mr. Snow rose, marched to the door, and took upon himself to call Margery, asking whether she deemed it conducive to the health of young damsels to keep them out of bed to that hour. Margery came in a temper: it was her master's fault; he *would* keep her up: and she supposed when he had got the child to himself over in them Botany Bay lands, and she, Margery, not at hand to see to things, he'd be for keeping her up till midnight.

"Then you don't mean to go yourself?" cried Mr. Snow.

No she didn't, Margery answered. Not unless she took leave of her senses, and went off afore they came back to her! She could see enough of thieves at home here, and of elephants too. Anybody as liked to pay sixpence to a traveling caravan could feast their eyes on one o' them beasts—and much good might it do 'em!

There was a battle with Miss Meta. She did not want to go to bed, and she resented the interference of a stranger. Margery was carrying her off, crying, shrieking, and—the truth must be told—kicking, when Maria rose. "Put her down an instant, Margery."

She stooped and gathered the child in her loving arms. A minute given to the subsiding of Miss Meta's grief, or temper, whichever you like to call it, and then Maria whispered in her ear.

"Be good for my sake, darling. I am not well; I think I am getting worse, Meta. Don't grieve mamma while she is with you. Say good-night to Mr. Snow."

Loving and obedient and with a

graciousness of spirit that many, far older, might have taken a pattern from, the child ran up to Mr. Snow, her hand held out, the tears of rebellion drying on her cheeks. "I'm going for mamma. Good-night, Mr. Snow."

They could hear her chattering pleasantly as she went up-stairs with Margery. Mr. Snow stayed talking with Maria: charging her to do this, not to do the other, to go on with this medicine, to leave off that; threatening her with unheard-of penalties if he caught her crying again in that violent fashion, only fit for a dramatic heroine at the play; and largely promised her to be well in no time if she'd only attend to his directions, and make an effort of herself. Perhaps those promises were vague, as certain other large promises you have heard of—those made to Meta by George.

That same night Mr. Snow was called up to Mrs. George Godolphin. —Let us call her so to the end; but she is Mrs. Godolphin now. Margery was sleeping quietly, the child in a little bed by her side, when she was aroused by some one standing over her. It was her mistress, in her night-dress. Up started the woman, wide-awake instantly, crying out to know what was the matter.

"Margery, I shan't be in time. There's the ship waiting to sail, and none of my things are ready. I can't go without my things."

Margery, experienced in illness of many kinds, saw what it was. That her mistress had suddenly awoke from some vivid dream, and, in her weak state, was unable to shake off the delusion. In fact, that species of half-consciousness, half-delirium, was upon her, which is apt in the night-time to attack some patients laboring under long-continued and excessive weakness.

She had come up exactly as she got out of bed. No slippers on her feet, nothing extra put on her shoulders. As Margery threw a warm woollen-shawl over those shoulders, she felt the ominous damp of the night-dress. A pair of list shoes of her own were

at the bedside, and she hastily thrust them on her mistress's feet.

"Let's make haste down to your bed, ma'am, and we'll see about the things there."

Ere the lapse of another minute, Maria was in the bed, Margery covering her warmly up. Margery had flung an old cloak over herself, and she now put on the list shoes, and stood talking with and humoring her mistress until her full consciousness should come.

"There'll be no time, Margery; there'll be no time to get the things; they never could be bought and made, you know. Oh, Margery! the ship must not go without me! What will be done?"

"I'll telegraph up to that ship to-morrow morning, and get him to put off his start for a week or two," cried Margery, nodding her head with authority. "Never you trouble yourself, ma'am; it'll be all right. You go to sleep again comfortable, and we'll see about the things with morning light."

Some little time Margery talked; a stock of this should be got in, a stock of the other: as for linen, it could all be bought ready-made,—and the best way, too; now calico was so cheap. Somewhat surprised that she heard no answer, no further expressed fear, Margery looked close at her mistress by the light of the night-lamp, wondering whether she had gone to sleep again. She had not gone to sleep. She was lying still, cold, white, without sense or motion: and Margery, collected Margery, very nearly gave vent to a scream.

Maria had fainted away. There was no doubt of that, but Margery did not understand it at all, or why she should have fainted when she ought to have gone to sleep. Margery liked it as little as she understood it; and she ran up-stairs to their landlady, Mrs. James, and got her to dispatch her son for Mr. Snow.

Maria had recovered consciousness when he came in, both from the fainting-fit and from the delusion. He did not seem to think much of it; not half

as much as he did about the violent fit of weeping in which he had caught her in the evening: it was nothing but the effects of the exhaustion left by that, as he believed. He administered some restorative, and said he would come again betimes in the morning.

"I'll stop here the rest of the night, and watch," said Margery, as he departed.

But Maria would not hear of it. "I am not ill, Margery; it has all passed. Indeed, I insist upon your going to your bed."

"Well, then, don't you get having none o' them dreams, ma'am, again!" remonstrated Margery. "I don't like 'em. You might catch your death of cold a-coming up that shivering staircase out o' your hot bed. And the child, too! if she got woke up by your coming in, there's no knowing what fright it mightn't put her into!"

But that was only the beginning. Night after night would these attacks of semi-delirium beset her. Mr. Snow came and came, and drew an ominous face, and doubled the tonics and changed them, and talked, and joked, and scolded. But it all seemed of no avail: she certainly did not get better. Weary, weary hours! weary, weary days! as she lay there alone, struggling with her malady. And yet no malady either that Mr. Snow could discover,—nothing but a weakness, which he only half believed in.

CHAPTER LXVII.

A BANE, AS WAS PREDICTED YEARS BEFORE.

JANET and Bessy Godolphin sat with Mrs. George. The time had come for Janet to quit Ashlydyat, and she was paying her farewell visit to Maria. Maria looked pretty well when they had come in, as she sat at the window at work,—at work with her weak and fevered hands. No very

poetical employment, that on which she was engaged, but one which has to be done in most families, nevertheless—stocking-darning. She was darning socks for Miss Meta. Miss Meta, her sleeves and white pinafore tied up with black ribbon, her golden curls somewhat in disorder, for the young lady had rebelliously broken from Margery, and taken a race round the garden in the blowing wintry wind, her smooth cheeks fresh and rosy, was now roasting her face in front of the fire, her doll and a whole collection of doll's clothes lying around her on the hearth-rug.

Maria laid down her work when the Miss Godolphins in their deep mourning entered, and rose to shake hands, and drew forward chairs for them, and did altogether as anybody else does at receiving intimate friends, and seemed pretty well. In moments of excitement,—and the slightest thing excited her now,—she appeared to be buoyed up with artificial strength. Meta bustled here and there, and threw her doll into a corner, and scattered its clothes anywhere, and chattered without ceasing: she began to tell Bessy of the large elephant papa would keep for her to go out riding upon in India.

Bessy had come, not so much to accompany Janet as for a special purpose,—that of delivering a message from Lady Godolphin. My lady, deeming possibly that her displeasure had lasted long enough, graciously charged Bessy with an invitation to Maria, to spend a week at the Folly ere her departure for Calcutta. She would have come herself and invited her in person, she bade Bessy say, but for a bad cold which confined her indoors, and she included Miss Meta in the invitation,—a notable mark of attention, since Lady Godolphin much disliked children so long as they were at their troublesome age, and had never, in all the remembrance of Prior's Ash, invited one, Meta excepted, to a sojourn at her house.

"She was not for inviting Meta now," said straightforward Bessy,

"but I said I would take care that she was not troublesome, in the presence of Lady Godolphin. I hope you will come, Maria. If you will fix your own time, she said, the carriage shall be here to bring you."

Maria gave a sort of sobbing sigh. "She is very kind. Tell Lady Godolphin how kind I feel it of her, Bessy; but I am not well enough to go from home now."

"My opinion was, that Maria would have little enough of time at home for her preparations for the voyage, without going from it for a week," remarked Janet. "But about that, my dear,"—turning kindly to her,—“you must be the best judge.”

"I could not go, Janet; I am not strong enough. Bessy will be so kind, as to explain that to Lady Godolphin. I cannot get up before middle-day now."

Bessy looked at her. "But, Maria, if you are not strong enough to go out on a week's visit, how shall you be strong enough to undertake a three-months' voyage?"

Maria paused ere she answered the question. She was gazing out straight before her, as if seeing something at a distance,—something in the future. "I think of it and of its uncertainty a great deal," she presently said. "If I can only get away; if I can only keep up sufficiently to get away, I can lie down in my berth always. And if I do die before I reach India, George will be with me."

"Child!" almost sharply interrupted Janet, "what are you saying?"

She seemed scarcely to hear the interruption. She sat, gazing still, her white and trembling hands lying clasped on her black dress, and she resumed, as if pursuing the train of thought.

"My great dread is, lest I should not keep up to get to London, to be taken on board,—lest George should, after all, be obliged to sail without me. It is always on my mind, Janet; it makes me dream constantly that the ship is gone and I am left behind. I wish I did not have those dreams."

"Come to Lady Godolphin's Folly, Maria," persuasively spoke Bessy. "It will be the very best thing to cheat you of these fears. They all arise from weakness."

"Yes, I say so to myself in the daytime; that those night fancies are only the result of weakness," acquiesced Maria, who appeared to rouse up from her dreamy thought at Bessy's remark. "But I am not well enough to go to the Folly, Bessy. Margery can tell you how ill I am every night, after I wake out of those fever-dreams. The first night they fetched Mr. Snow to me, for I fainted."

"My dear," said Janet, soothingly and quietly, "the change to the sea air, to the altogether different life of the voyage, may restore you to health and strength in an incredibly short time."

"At times I think it may," answered Maria. "I had a pleasant dream one night," she added, with some animation. "I thought we had arrived in safety, and I and George and Meta were sitting under a tree whose leaves were larger than an umbrella. It was so hot, but these leaves shaded us, and I seemed to be well, for we were all laughing merrily together. It may come true, you know, Janet."

"Yes," assented Janet. "Are you preparing much for the voyage?"

"Not yet. Things can be had so quickly now. George talked it over with me when he was down, and we decided to send a list to the outfitter's, just before we sailed, so that the things might not come down here, but be packed in London."

"And Margery?" asked Janet.

"I do not know what she means to do," answered Maria, shaking her head. "She protests ten times a day that she will not go; but I see she is carefully mending up all her cotton gowns, and one day I heard her say to Meta that she supposed nothing was bearable but cotton on a body's back out there. What I should do without Margery on the voyage, I don't like to think. George told her

to consider of it, and give us her decision when he next came down. And you, Janet? When shall you be back at Prior's Ash?"

"I do not suppose I shall ever come back to it," was Janet's answer. "Its reminiscences will not be so pleasing to me that I should seek to renew my acquaintance with it. What have I left here now? Nothing, save the grave of Thomas, and of my father and mother. Cecilia has her new ties: and Bessy can come to see me in Scotland."

"Bexley attends you, I hear."

"Yes. My aunt's old servant has got beyond his work,—he has been forty-two years in the family, Maria,—and Bexley will replace him. I—What is it, child?"

Janet turned to Meta, who was making a great commotion. In searching in a deep basket for some doll's clothes to show to Bessy, she had come upon a charming frock elaborately braided, which was decidedly too big for the doll. Of course Meta jumped to the conclusion that it must be for herself, and she was just as fond of finery as are other women in embryo. Dragging the material from its place, she flew over to her mamma, asking whether it was not hers, and when she might put it on, utterly regardless of two long streams of braid which trailed after it.

Ah, how sick did Maria turn with the sight,—with the remembrance it brought to her! That long past day, the last of her happiness, when she had been working quickly to finish the frock, rose vividly before her mind's eye. She saw herself sitting there, in her own pleasant morning-room at the bank, blithely plying her needle in her unconscious peace, knowing nothing of those ominous shutters that were being drawn over the bank-windows. What with sickness of heart and of body, Maria had never had courage to bring the frock to light since, or to attempt to finish it.

"Put it up again, Meta," she said, faintly.

"But Bessy had laid hold of it,—

industrious, practical Bessy. "Let me finish this for you, Maria. It will be a nice cool frock for the child in India. Dear me! there's not above an hour or two's work wanted at it. I'll take it home with me."

Maria murmured something about the trouble that came upon her, the illness that supervened upon it, as a lame attempt at apology. She was aware that unfinished work, lying by indefinitely, was little less than a cardinal sin in the eyes of methodical Janet. Bessy folded it up to take with her, and Janet rose.

"No, stay where you are, child," she said, bending over Maria, who was then lying back in her chair, looking grievously wan and ill. "I can say good-by to you as you lie there. Take this, my dear," she whispered. "It is for yourself."

Janet had slipped four sovereigns into her hand. Maria's face turned crimson. "You need not scruple, Maria. It is superfluous in my purse. My aunt sent me a handsome present for mourning and traveling expenses, — a great deal more than I want."

"Indeed I have enough too, Janet. George left me five pounds when he was at home, and it is not half gone. You don't know what a little keeps us. I eat next to nothing, and Margery, I think, lives chiefly upon porridge: there's only Meta."

"But you ought to eat, child!"

"I can't eat," said Maria. "I have never lost that pain in my throat."

"What pain?" asked Janet.

"I do not know. It came on with that trouble. I feel, — I feel always ill within me, Janet. I seem to be always shivering inwardly; and the pain in the throat is sometimes better, sometimes worse, but it never goes quite away."

Janet looked at her searchingly. She heard the meek, resigned tone, she saw the white and wan face, the attenuate hands, the chest rising with every passing emotion, the sad, mournful look in the sweet eyes, and for the first time a suspicion that another life

would shortly have to go, took possession of Miss Godolphin.

"What is George at, that he is not here to see after you?" she asked, in a strangely severe accent.

"He cannot bear Prior's Ash, Janet," whispered Maria. "But for me and Thomas he never would have come back to it. And I suppose he is busy in London: there must be many arrangements to make."

Janet stopped and gravely kissed her, — kissed her twice. "Take care of yourself, my dear, and do all you can to keep your mind tranquil and to get your strength up. You shall hear from me before your departure."

Margery stood in the little hall. Miss Bessy Godolphin was in the garden, in full chase after that rebellious damsel, Meta, who had made a second escape through the opened door, passing angry Margery and the outstretched hand that would have made a prisoner of her, with a gleeful laugh of defiance. Miss Godolphin stopped to address Margery.

"Shall you go to India or not, Margery?"

"I'm just a'most tore in two about it, ma'am," was the answer, delivered confidentially. "Without me that child would never reach tother side alive: she'd be clambering up the sides o' the ship and get drownded ten times over afore they got there. Look at her now! And who'd take care of her over there, among them native beasts, — them elephants and them black people? If I thought she'd ever come to be waited on by a black animal of a woman with a yellow cover to her head and woolly hair, I should be fit to smother her afore she went out. Miss Janet, I'd like much to talk that and some other matters over with you, if you'd got half an hour to spare me afore you start."

"Very well, Margery. Perhaps you can come to Ashlydyat to-night. I am going, you know, by to-morrow's early train. Margery," she more seriously added, "your mistress appears to want the greatest care."

"She have wanted that a long while," was Margery's composed answer.

"She ought to have every thing strengthening in great plenty. Wine and other necessaries requisite for the sick."

"I suppose she ought," said Margery. "But she won't take 'em, Miss Janet; she says she can't eat and drink. And for the matter of that, we have got nothing of that sort for her to take. There was more good things consumed in the bank in a day than we should see in a month now."

"Where's your master?" repeated Janet, in an accent not less sharp than the one she had used for the same question to Maria.

"He!" cried wrathful Margery, for the subject was sure to put her uncommonly out, in the strong opinion she was pleased to hold touching her master's shortcomings. "I suppose he's riding about with his choice friend, Madam Pain. Folks talks of their two horses being seen abreast pretty often."

There was no opportunity for further colloquy. Bessy came in, carrying the shrieking, laughing truant; and Margery, with a tart word to the young lady, and a jerk of the little arm by way of reminder, attended the Miss Godolphins down the garden-path to throw open the gate for them. In her poor way, in her solitary self, Margery strove to make up for the state they had been accustomed to, when the ladies called from Ashlydyat.

Maria, lying motionless on the sofa, where, on being left alone, she had thrown herself in weariness, heard Margery's gratuitous remark about Mrs. Pain through the unlatched door, and a contraction of pain arose to her brow. In her hand lay the four sovereigns left there by Janet. She looked at them musingly, and then murmured, "I can afford to give her half." When Margery returned in-doors, she called her in.

"You are not very busy this afternoon are you, Margery?"

Margery grunted out her answer.

Not so overbusy, perhaps; but for the matter of that there was always plenty to do.

"Can you go down as far as the Pollard cottages?" resumed Maria. "I wish very much to see Mrs. Bond, Margery. Ask her to come up here. It will be a nice walk for you and Meta."

Margery looked dubious. The wind was in the east, and would blow sharply on her darling: and that Dame Bond, in Margery's opinion, was better in her own house than in theirs. But she made no remonstrance. Crusty as she appeared to be in temper, she was a better servant than to attempt to dispute her mistress's will, and she dressed herself and Meta and started.

But no sooner had they gone than they were back again, and Mrs. Bond with them, for they had discerned that respected lady sailing along, almost immediately after quitting the house. Very steady on her legs was Mrs. Bond to-day: her face had a pinched look, and her thin shawl and wretched old black gown were drawn tight round her to protect her, so far as might be, from the early winter's cold. Margery eyed her critically, and with a sniff which really might have been taken to express a sort of satisfaction, crossed the road, holding Meta by the hand.

"Now, Dame Bond! where be you off to?"

Dame Bond, of humble mind when not exalted by extraneous adjuncts, dropped a curtsy to Margery and another to Miss Meta. She heered the ladies at t'other end of the town was a putting down the names for the coal charity a'ready, and she was a-going to see if she couldn't get hers put down among 'em,—they refused her last year. Goodness know'd as she'd need of it.

"Well, Mrs. George Godolphin wants to speak to you, so you'd better come to her at once," said Margery. "And take care of your behaviour when you be in her presence," she sharply added.

There was not altogether need to give that injunction to-day. Mrs. Bond, on her meekest and civilest behavior, stood before Maria, who rose up from her sofa, and kindly invited her to a chair. Then she put two sovereigns in her hand.

"It is the first instalment of my debt to you, Mrs. Bond. If I live, I will pay it you all, but it will be by degrees. And perhaps that is the best way that you could receive it. I wish I could have given you some before."

Mrs. Bond burst into tears,—not the crocodile tears that she was somewhat in the habit of favoring the world with when not entirely herself, but real, genuine tears of gratitude. She had given up all hope of the ten pounds, did not look to receive a penny-piece of it, and the joy overcame her. Her conscience pricked her a little also, for she remembered sundry hard words she had at one time liberally regaled her neighbors' ears with, touching Mrs. George Godolphin. In her grateful repentance, she could have knelt at Maria's feet,—hunger and other ills of poverty had tended to subdue her spirit.

"May the good Lord bless and repay ye, ma'am,—and send you a safe journey to the far-off place where I hear ye be a-going!"

"Yes, I shall go if I am well enough," replied Maria. "It is from there that I shall send you home some money from time to time as I can. Have you been well lately?"

"As well as pretty nigh clamming 'll let me be, ma'am. Things has gone hard with me: many a day I've not had as much as a mouldy crust. But this 'll set me up again, and, ma'am, I'll never cease to pray for ye."

"Don't spend it in—in—you know, Mrs. Bond," Maria ventured timidly to advise, in a lowered voice.

Mrs. Bond shook her head and turned up her eyes by way of expressing a very powerful negative. Probably she did not feel altogether comfortable in the subject, for she hastened to quit it.

"Have ye heard the news about old Jekyl, ma'am?"

"No. What news?"

"He be dead. He went off at one o'clock this a'ternoon. He fretted continual after his money, folks says, and it wore him down to a skeleton. He couldn't a-bear to be living upon his sons, and Jonathan, he don't earn enough for himself now, and the old 'un felt it."

Somebody else was feeling it. Fretting continually after his money!—that money which might never have been placed in the bank but for her! Poor Maria pressed her fingers upon her aching forehead; and Mrs. Bond plunged into another item of news.

"Them Hardings be bankrupts."

"Harding the undertaker?" cried Maria, quickly.

"They be, ma'am. The shop were shut up as close as a dungeon when I come by it just now, and a man, what was standing there a-staring at it, said as he heered it 'ud go hard with 'em. There ain't nothing but trouble in the world now, ma'am, for some."

No, nothing but trouble for some,—Maria felt the truth to her heart of hearts. The remembrance of the interview she had held with Mrs. Harding, and what had been said at it, was very present to her.

Perhaps it was well that a diversitement occurred. Miss Meta, who had been up-stairs with Margery to have her things taken off, came in in her usual flying fashion, went straight up to the visitor, and leaned her pretty arm upon the snuffy black gown.

"When shall I come and see the parrot?"

"The parrot! Lawks bless the child! I haven't got the parrot now, I haven't had him for this many a day. I couldn't let *him* clam," she continued, turning to Maria. "I was a clamming myself, ma'am, and I sold him, cage and all, just as he stood."

"Where is he?" asked Meta, looking disappointed

"Where he went," lucidly explained Mrs. Bond. "It were the lady up at the tother end o' the town, beyond the parson's, what bought him, ma'am. Leastways her daughter did,—sister to her what was once to have married Mr. Godolphin. It's a white house."

"Lady Sarah Grame's," said Maria. "Did she buy the parrot?"

"Miss did; that cross-looking daughter of her'n. She see him as she was a going by my door one day, ma'am, and she stopped and looked at him, and asked me what I'd sell him for. Well, on the spur of the moment, I said five shilling; for I'd not a half-penny in the place to buy him food, and for days and days he had had only what the neighbors brought him,—but it warn't half his worth. And miss was all wild to buy him, but her mother wasn't; she didn't want screeching birds in her house, she said; and they had a desperate quarrel in my kitchen afore they went away. Didn't she call her mother names! She's a vixen, that daughter, if ever there were one. But she got her will, for, an hour or two after that, a young woman came down for the parrot with the five shillings in her hand. And there's where he is."

"I shall have twenty parrots when I go to India," struck in Meta.

"What a sight o' food they'll eat!" ejaculated Mrs. Bond. "That there one o' mine eats his fill now. I made bold one day to go up and ask after him, and the two young women in the kitchen took me to the room to see him, the ladies being out, and he had got his tin stuffed full o' seed. He knowed me again, he did, and screeched out to be heard a mile off. The young women said that what with his screeching and the two ladies quarrelling, the house weren't a bearable sometimes."

Meta's large eyes were wide open in wondering speculation. "Why do they quarrel?" she asked.

"'Cause it's their natur," returned Mrs. Bond. "The one what had the sweet natur was took, and the two cranky ones was left. Them young women said that miss a'most druv t'other, my lady, mad with her temper, and they expected nothing less but there'd be blows some day. A fine disgraceful thing to say o' born ladies, ain't it, ma'am?"

Maria in her delicacy of feeling would not indorse the remark of Dame Bond. But the state of things at Lady Sarah Grame's was perfectly well known at Prior's Ash. Do you remember an observation made by Mr. Snow to Thomas Godolphin, when he was speaking of Lady Sarah's cruel unkindness to Ethel! "She'll be brought to her senses, unless I am mistaken: she has lost her treasure and kept her bane. A year or two more, and that's what Sarah Anne will be."

It was precisely what Sarah Anne Grame had become,—her mother's bane. A miserable bane! to herself, to her mother, to all about her. And the "screeching" parrot had only added a little more noise to an already too noisy house.

Mrs. Bond curtseyed herself out. She met Margery in the passage, and stopped to whisper.

"I say! how ill she do look!"

"Who looks ill?" was the ungracious demand.

Mrs. Bond gave her head a nod sideways towards the parlor-door. "The missis. Her face looks more as if it had got death writ in it, nor voyage going."

"Perhaps you'll walk on your road, Dame Bond, and keep your opinions till they're asked for," was the tart reply of Margery.

But in point of fact the ominous words had darted into the faithful servant's heart, piercing it as a poisoned arrow. It seemed such a confirmation of her own fears.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

COMMOTION AT ASHLYDYAT.

A FEW days went on, and they wrought a rapid change in Mrs. George Godolphin. She grew weaker and weaker: she grew—it was apparent now to Mr. Snow as it was to Margery—nearer and nearer to that vault in the churchyard of All Souls. There could no longer be any indecision or uncertainty as to her taking the voyage: the probabilities were, that before the ship was ready to sail all sailing in this world for Maria would be over. And rumors, faint, doubtful, very much discredited rumors of this state of things, began to circulate in Prior's Ash.

Discredited because people were so unprepared for it. Mrs. George Godolphin had been delicate since the birth of her baby, as was known to everybody, but not a soul, relatives, friends, or strangers, had cast a suspicion to danger. On the contrary, it was supposed that she was about to depart on that Indian voyage: and ill-natured spirits jerked up their heads and said it was fine to be Mrs. George Godolphin, to tumble upon her legs again and go out to lead a grand life in India, after ruining half Prior's Ash. How she was misjudged! how many more unhappy wives have been, and will be again, misjudged by the world!

One dreary afternoon, as the dusk was coming on, Margery, not stopping, or perhaps not caring to put any thing upon herself, but having hastily wrapped up Miss Meta, went quickly down the garden-path, leading that excitable and chattering demoiselle by the hand. Curious news had reached the ears of Margery. Their landlady's son had come in, describing the town as being in a strange commotion in consequence of something which had happened at Ashlydyat. Rumor set it down as nothing less than murder; and according to the boy's account, all Prior's Ash was flocking up to the place to see and to hear.

Margery turned wrathful at the news. Murder at Ashlydyat! The young gentleman was too big to be boxed or shaken for saying it, but he persisted in his story, and Margery in her curiosity went out to see with her own eyes. "The people are running past the top of this road in crowds," he said to her.

Not in "crowds," certainly. Tongues are exaggeratory as rumor is false. When Margery reached the top of the road, several idlers undoubtedly were hastening past in the direction of Ashlydyat, but not so very many. Margery, pouncing upon one and upon another, contrived to obtain a pretty correct account of the actual facts.

For some days past, workmen had been employed, digging up the Dark Plain by the orders of Lord Averil. As he had told Cecil weeks before, his intention was completely to renovate it; to do away entirely with its past ill-character and send its superstition to the winds. The archway was being taken down, the gorse-bushes were being uprooted, the whole surface, in fact, was being dug up. He intended to build an extensive summer-house where the archway had been, and to make the plain a flower-garden, a playground for children when they should be born to Ashlydyat: and it appeared that in digging that afternoon under the archway, the men had come upon a human skeleton, or rather upon the bones of what had once been a skeleton. This was the whole foundation for the rumor and the "murder."

As Margery stood, about to turn home again, vexed for having been brought out in the cold for nothing more, and intending to give a few complimentary thanks for it to the young man who had been the means of sending her, she was accosted by Mr. Crosse. That gentleman, whose residence was situated about three miles from Prior's Ash, had been living at it since his return, the night you saw him coming from the rail when he was met by Charlotte Pain. He had been frequently at Ashlydyat, had

been a closer friend of Thomas Godolphin's than ever; but not the slightest notice had he taken of George or his wife. His opinion of George was about as bad as it could be, and he did not seek to conceal it. How he would have reconciled himself to meet him at the funeral, it is impossible to say, but circumstances prevented Mr. Crosse's attendance at it. For a day or two before Thomas Godolphin's death and a week after it, he was laid up with gout, and unable to leave his house. Now he was out again.

"How d'ye do, Margery?" he said, lifting up Meta at the same time to kiss her; for the young lady had been an uncommon favorite of his in the old days at the bank, and he used to lavish presents upon her, just for the sake of watching her delight at their reception. "Are you going up to Ashlydyat with the rest?"

"Not I, the simpletons!" was Margery's free rejoinder. "I'll be bound it's nothing but the bones of some poor old donkey that they've found,—the animals used to stray sometimes on to the Dark Plain. And me to have been brought out from home by their folly, leaving my mistress all alone!—and she not in a state to be left."

"Is she ill?" asked Mr. Crosse.

"Ill!" returned Margery, not at all pleased at the question. "Yes, sir, she is ill. I thought everybody knew that."

"When does she start for India?"

"She don't start at all. She'll be starting soon for a place a little bit nearer. Here! you run on and open the gate," added Margery, whisking Meta from Mr. Crosse's hand and sending her down the lane out of hearing. "She'll soon be where Mr. Thomas Godolphin is, sir, instead of being marched off in a ship to India," continued the woman, turning to Mr. Crosse, confidentially.

He felt greatly shocked. In his own mind, he, as many others, had associated Maria with her husband, in regard to the summer's work, in a

lofty, scornful, hold-myself-off sort of way: but it did shock him to hear that she was in fear of death. It is most wonderful how our feelings towards others soften when we find they and their shortcomings are about to be taken from us to a more merciful Judge.

"But what is the matter with her, Margery?" Mr. Crosse asked; for it happened that he had not heard the ominous rumors that were beginning to circulate in Prior's Ash.

"I don't know what's the matter with her," returned Margery. "I don't believe old Snow knows it, either. I suppose the worry and misfortunes have been too much for her,—that she couldn't bear up again 'em. They fell upon nobody, unless it was Mr. Thomas Godolphin, as they have fell upon her, and she's just one to break her heart over 'em. She and him have been expiating another's folly: he is in his grave, and she's a-going to it."

Mr. Crosse walked mechanically by the side of Margery down the lane. It was not his way, and perhaps he was unconscious that he took it; he walked by her side, listening.

"He'll have to go by himself now,—and me to have been getting up all my cotton gowns for the start! Serve him right! for ever thinking of taking out that dear little lamb amid elephants and savages!"

Mr. Crosse was perfectly aware that Margery alluded to her master,—his own bête noire since the explosion. But he did not choose to descant upon his gracelessness to Margery. "Can nothing be done for Mrs. George Godolphin?" he asked.

"I expect not, sir. There's nothing the matter with her that can be laid hold of," resentfully spoke Margery, "no malady to treat. Snow says he can't do any thing, and he brought Dr. Beale in the other day; and it seems he can't do nothing, either."

Meta had gained the gate, flung it open in obedience to orders, and now came running back. Mr. Crosse took her hand and went on with her. Was

he purposing to pay a visit to George Godolphin's wife? It seemed so.

It was quite dusk when they entered. Maria was lying on the sofa, with a warm woolen coverlid drawn over her. There was no light in the room save that given out by the fire, but its blaze fell directly on her face. Mr. Crosse stood and looked at it, shocked at the ravages, at the tale it told. All kinds of unpleasant pricks were sending their darts through his conscience. He had been holding himself aloof in his assumed superiority, his haughty condemnation, while she had been going to the grave with her breaking heart.

Had she wanted things that money could procure? had she wanted *food*? Mr. Crosse actually began to ask himself the question, as the wan aspect of the white face grew and grew upon him: and in the moment he quite loathed the thought of his well-stored coffers. He remembered what a good, loving, gentle woman this wife of George Godolphin's had always been, this dutiful daughter of All Souls' pastor: and for the first time Mr. Crosse began to separate her from her husband's misdoings, to awake to the conviction that the burden and sorrow laid upon her had been enough to bear, without the world meting out its harsh measure of blame by way of increase.

He sat down quite humbly, saying "hush" to Meta. Maria had dropped into one of those delirious sleeps: they came on more frequently now, and would visit her at the dusk hour of the evening as well as at night; and the noise of their entrance had failed to arouse her. Margery, however, came bustling in.

"It's Mr. Crosse, ma'am."

She partially awoke. Only partially: turned on the pillow, opened her eyes, and held out her hand. He leaned over her, and spoke in a very kind voice as he took it.

"I am so sorry to see you like this, Mrs. George Godolphin. I had no idea you were so ill. Is there any thing I can do for you?"

"If I could pay Mrs. Bond," she answered. "She is so poor! If I could but pay her before the ship sails!"

Mr. Crosse saw the state of things instantly,—that she was under the influence of some vivid dream. Margery spoke in a louder key, and advanced to shake up the sofa pillow. "You'd be better sitting up, ma'am. It's Mr. Crosse: don't you know him? Me and the child met him out there, and he come in with us to see you."

It had the desired effect, completely arousing her: and Maria, a faint hectic of surprise coming into her cheeks, sat up and let him take her hand. "I am glad to have the opportunity of seeing you once again," she said.

"Why did you not send and tell me how ill you were?" burst forth Mr. Crosse, forgetting how exceedingly ill such a procedure would have accorded with his own line of holding aloft in condemnatory superiority.

She shook her head. "I might, had things been as they used to be. But people do not care to come near me now."

"And it was not your fault!" cried Mr. Crosse in his heat, in his self-reproach.

"No, it was not my fault," she sadly answered, believing he had spoken it as a question. "I knew nothing about it any more than the greatest stranger. The blow fell upon me as startlingly as it fell upon the rest."

"I am going in the ship, Mr. Crosse. I am going to ride upon an elephant and to have parrots. I'm going to take my dolls."

He laid his hand kindly upon the chattering child: but he turned to Maria, his voice dropping to a whisper. "What shall you do with her? Shall you send her out without you?"

The question struck upon the one chord of her heart that for the last day or two, since her own hopeless state grew more palpable, had been strung to the utmost tension. What was to become of Meta,—of the cherished child whom she must leave behind her? Her face grew moist, her bosom

heaved, and she suddenly pressed her hands upon it as if they could still its wild and painful beating. Mr. Crosse, blaming himself for asking it, blaming himself for many other things, took her hands within his and said he would come in and see her in the morning, she seemed so fatigued then.

But, low as the question had been put, Miss Meta heard it,—heard it and understood its purport. Rely upon it, children understand far more than we give them credit for. She entwined her pretty arms within her mamma's dress as Mr. Crosse went out, and raised her wondering eyes.

"What did he mean? You are coming too, mamma!"

She drew the little upturned face close to hers, she laid her white cheek upon the golden hair. The very excess of pain that was rending her aching heart caused her to speak with unnatural stillness. Not that she could speak at first; a minute or two had to be given to master her emotion.

"I am afraid not, Meta. I think God is going to take me."

The child made no reply. Her earnest eyes were kept wide open with the same wondering stare. "What will papa do?" she presently asked.

Maria hastily passed her hand across her brow, as if that recalled another phase of the pain. Meta's little heart began to swell, and the tears burst forth.

"Don't go, mamma! Don't go away from papa and Meta! I shall be afraid of the elephants without you."

She pressed the child closer and closer to her beating heart. Oh, the pain, the pain!—the pain of the parting that was so soon to come! How she beat down its outward signs, how she continued to speak calmly, surprised herself.

"Meta, darling, I think I have lately been getting in spirit nearer and nearer to God,—as Uncle Thomas got near to Him; and I see things in a different light from what I had used to see them. I do not suppose you will go out now; but if you should, God will take care of you amidst the elephants

and all other dangers. I am asking Him always; and I know He will take charge of you here Himself, and bring you to me when your life is over. There are times, Meta, as I lie here alone, when God seems to be quite close to me, and I have learned that there is no friend on earth like Him. Meta, when my heart is ready to break at leaving you, it is he who whispers to me that I may trust all to Him. He is listening to me now, darling; He is quite close; He sees every one of your tears; He knows that I can scarcely say this to you for my aching pain, and He will be a more loving protector to my little motherless girl than I could have been. I shall be up there in heaven, waiting for you and looking down upon you, and God will be taking care of you on earth."

Meta turned her eyes to the uncurtained window, looking up to the winter evening sky. "Has heaven got windows?" she asked.

"I think it has. I think that God lets us look down on the dear ones we have left. At least,—at least it is pleasant to think so when we are about to leave them. Meta, darling, it can do you no harm to think so. When mamma shall be gone to that better place, and you are left alone here, you can look up often and think of the time that you will be going there. It will soon come."

Perhaps it was as well that they were interrupted: these moments are too painful to be much prolonged. Meta was sobbing with all her might, when her attention was diverted by a clash and dash at the gate. A carriage had bowled down the lane and drawn up at it, almost with the commotion that used to attend the dashing visits to the bank of Mrs. Charlotte Pain. A more sober equipage this, however, with its mourning appointments, although it bore a coronet on its panels. The footman descended to open the door, and one lady stepped out of it.

"It is Aunt Cecil," called out Meta. She rubbed the tears from her pretty

cheeks, her grief forgotten, childlike, in the new excitement, and flew out to meet Lady Averil. Maria, trying to look her best, rose from the sofa and tottered forward to receive her. Meta was pounced upon by Margery and carried off to have her tumbled hair smoothed; and Lady Averil came in alone.

She threw back her crape veil to kiss Maria. She had come down from Ashlydyat on purpose to tell her the news of the bones being found: there could be little doubt that they were those of the ill-fated Richard de Commins, which had been so fruitlessly searched for: and Lady Averil was full of the excitement. Perhaps it was natural that she should be, being a Godolphin.

"It is most strange that they should be found just now," she cried,—“at the very time that the Dark Plain is being done away with. You know, Maria, the tradition always ran that so long as the bones remained un-found, the Dark Plain would retain the appearance of a graveyard. Is it not a singular coincidence,—that they should be discovered at the moment that the plain is being dug up? Were Janet here, she would say how startlingly all the old superstition is being worked out.”

"I think one thing especially strange,—that they should not have been found before," observed Maria. "Have they not been searched for often?"

"I believe so," replied Cecil. "But they were found under the archway, immediately under it: and I fancy they had always been searched for in the Dark Plain. When papa had the gorse-bushes rooted up they were looked for then in all parts of the Plain, but not under the archway."

"How came Lord Averil to think of looking under the archway?" asked Maria.

"He did not think of it. They have been found unexpectedly; they were not being searched for. The archway is taken down, and they were digging the foundation for the new summer-house, when they came upon

them. The grounds of Ashlydyat have been like a fair all the afternoon with people running up to see and hear," added Cecil. "Lord Averil is going to consult Mr. Hastings about giving them Christian burial."

"It does seem strange," murmured Maria. "Have you written to tell Janet?"

"No, I shall write to her to-morrow. I made haste down to you. Bessy came over from the Folly, but Lady Godolphin would not come: she said she had heard enough in her life of the superstition of Ashlydyat. She never liked it, you know, Maria,—never believed in it."

"Yes, I know," Maria answered. "It would anger her when it was spoken of,—as it angered papa."

"As George used to pretend that it angered him. I think it was pretence, though. Poor Thomas never. If he did not openly accord belief to it, he never ridiculed. How are your preparations getting on, Maria?"

Maria was going across the room with feeble steps to stir the fire into a blaze. As the light burst forth, she turned her face to Lady Averil with a sort of apology.

"I do not know what Margery is about that she does not bring the lamp. I am receiving you but poorly, Cecil."

Cecil smiled. "I think our topic, the superstition of Ashlydyat, is best discussed in such light as this, than in the full glare of lamplight."

But as Lady Averil spoke she was looking earnestly on Maria. The blaze had lighted up her wan face, and Cecil was struck aghast at its aspect. Was it real?—or was it but the effect cast by the shade of the firelight? Lady Averil had not heard of the ominous fears that were growing ripe, and hoped it was the latter.

"Maria, are you looking worse this evening?—or is the light deceiving me?"

"I dare say I am looking worse. I am worse. I am very ill, Cecil."

"You do not look fit to embark on this voyage."

Maria simply shook her head. She was sitting now in an old-fashioned elbow-chair, one white hand lying on her black dress, the other supporting her chin, while the firelight played on her wasted features.

"Would the little change to Ashlydyat benefit you, Maria? If so, if it would help to give you strength for your voyage, come to us at once. Now, don't refuse! It will give us so much pleasure. You do not know how Lord Averil loves and respects you. I think there is no one he so respects as he respects you. Let me take you home with me now."

Maria's eyelashes were wet as she turned them on her. "Thank you, Cecil, for your kindness: and Lord Averil—will you tell him so for me—I am always thanking in my heart. I wish I could go home with you; I wish I could go with a prospect of its doing me good; but that is over. I shall soon be in a narrower home."

Lady Averil's heart stood still, and then bounded on again. "No, no! Surely you are mistaken! It cannot be."

"I have suspected it long, Cecil! but since the last day or two it has become a certainty, and even Mr. Snow acknowledges it. About this time yesterday, at the dusk hour, he was sitting here, and I bade him not conceal the truth from me. I told him that I knew it, and did not shrink from it; and therefore it was the height of folly for him to pretend ignorance to me."

"Oh, Maria! And have you no regret at leaving us? I should think it a dreadful thing if I were going to die."

"I have been battling with my regrets a long while," said Maria, bending her head, and speaking in a low, subdued tone. "The leaving Meta is the worst. I know not who will take her, who will protect her: she cannot go with George, without—without a mother!"

"Give her to me," feverishly broke from the lips of Lady Averil. "You don't know how dearly I have ever

loved that child. Maria, she shall never know the want of the good mother she has lost, so far as I can supply your place, if you will let her come to me. It is well that the only child of the Godolphins,—and she is the only one,—should be reared at Ashlydyat."

Of all the world, Maria could best have wished Lady Averil to have Meta: and perhaps there had been moments when in her troubled imagination she had hoped it would be so. But she could not shut her eyes to its improbabilities.

"You will be having children of your own, Cecil. And there's Lord Averil!"

"Lord Averil is over-indulgent to me. I believe, if I wished to adopt half a dozen children, he would only smile and tell me to get a large nursery for them. I am quite sure he would like to have Meta."

"Then—if he will—oh, Cecil, I should die with less regret."

"Yes, yes, that is settled. He shall call and tell you so. But—Maria—is your own state so certain? Can nothing be done for you?—nothing be tried?"

"Nothing, as I believe. Mr. Snow cannot find out what is the matter with me. The trouble has been breaking my heart, Cecil,—I know of nothing else. And since I grew alarmed about my own state, there has been the thought of Meta. Many a time I have been tempted to wish that I could have her with me in my coffin."

"Aunt Cecil! Aunt Cecil! How many summer-houses are there to be, Aunt Cecil?"

You need not inquire whose interrupting voice it was. Lady Averil lifted the child on her knee, and asked whether she would come and pay her a long, long visit at Ashlydyat. Meta replied by inquiring into the prospect of swings and dolls'-houses, and Cecil plunged into promises as munificently as George could have done.

"Should George not be with you?" she whispered, as she bent over Maria previous to leaving.

"Yes, I am beginning to think he

ought to be now. I intend to write to him to-night: but I did not like to disturb him in his preparations. It will be a blow to him."

"What! does he not know of it?"

"Not yet. He thinks I am getting ready to go out with him. I wish I could have done it!"

No, not until the unhappy fact was placed beyond all doubt would Maria disturb her husband. And she did it gently at last. "I have been unwilling to alarm you, George, and I would not do it now, but that I believe it is all too certain. Will you come down and see what you think of me? Even Mr. Snow fears there is no hope for me now. Oh, if I could but have gone with you,—have gone with you to be your ever-loving wife still, in that new land!"

Lord Averil came in while she was addressing the letter. Greatly shocked, greatly grieved at what his wife told him, he got up from his dinner-table and walked down. Her husband expected, there was no one whom Maria would have been so pleased to see as Lord Averil. He had not come so much to tell her that he heartily concurred in his wife's offer with regard to the child,—though he did say it, say that she should be done by entirely as though she were his own, and his honest honorable nature shone out of his eyes as he spoke it,—as to see whether nothing could be done for herself, to entreat her to have further advice called in.

"Dr. Beale has been here twice," was her answer. "He says there is no hope."

Lord Averil held her hand in his, as he had taken it in greeting; his grave eyes of sympathy were bent with deep concern on her face. "Cecil thinks the trouble has been too much for you," he whispered. "Is it so?"

A streak of hectic came into her cheek. "Yes, I suppose it is that. Turn on which side I would, there was no comfort, no hope. Throughout it all, I never had a friend, save you, Lord Averil; and you know, and God

knows, what you did for us. I have not recompensed you; I do not see how I could have recompensed you had I lived: but when I am gone, you will be happy in knowing that you took the greatest weight from one who was stricken by the world."

"And it did not save you!" he wailed.

"No, it did not save me. It saved me from trouble, but not, you see, from death. It must have been God's will that it should not."

"You have been writing to George?" he observed, seeing the letter on the table. "But it will not go to-night: it is too late."

"It can go up by to-morrow's day-mail, and he will get it in the evening. Perhaps you will post it for me as you walk home: it will save Margery's going out."

Lord Averil put the letter in his pocket. He stood looking at her as she lay a little back in her easy-chair, his arm resting on the mantelpiece, and curious thoughts passing through his mind. Could he do nothing for her,—to avert the fate that was threatening her? He, a nobleman, rich in wealth, happy now in the world's favor; she, going to the grave in sorrow, it might be in privation—*what* could he do to help her?

There are moments when we speak out of our true heart, when the conventionalism that surrounds the best of us is thrown aside, all deceit, all form forgotten. Lord Averil was a good and true man, but never better, never truer than now, when he took a step forward and bent to Maria.

"Let me have the satisfaction of doing something for you! let me try and save you!" he implored in low, earnest tones. "If that may not be, let me help to lighten your remaining hours. How can I best do it?"

She held out her hand to him; she looked up to him, the gratitude she could not speak shining from her sweet eyes. "Indeed there is nothing now, Lord Averil. I wish I could thank you as you deserve for the past."

He held her hand for some time,

but she seemed weak, exhausted, and he said good-night. Margery attended him to the outer gate, in spite of his desire that she should not in the cold air, which seemed to threaten snow.

"Your mistress is very ill, Margery," he gravely said. "She seems to be in danger."

"I'm afeard she is, my lord. Up to the last day or two I thought she might take a turn and get over it; but since then she has got worse with every hour. There's some folks as can battle out things, and some folks as can't: she's one of the last sort, and she has been tried in all ways."

Lord Averil dropped the letter into the post-office, looking mechanically at its superscription, George Godolphin, Esquire. But that he was preoccupied with his own thoughts, he might have seen by the very writing how weak she was, for it was scarcely recognizable as hers. Very, very ill she looked; as if the end were growing ominously near; and Lord Averil did not altogether like the tardy summons which the letter would convey. A night and day yet before he could receive it. A moment's commune with himself, and then he took the path to the railway-station to the telegraph office, and sent off a message:

"Viscount Averil to George Godolphin, Esquire. Your wife is very ill. Come down by first train."

CHAPTER LXIX.

NEWS FOR ALL SOULS' RECTORY.

THE snow came early. It was nothing like Christmas yet, and here was the ground covered. The black skies had seemed to threaten it the previous night, but people were not prepared to find every thing wearing a white aspect when they rose in the morning.

Have you forgotten that long room in All Souls' rectory, its three win-

dows looking on the garden; at one of which windows Mrs. Hastings once stood, complaining to the rector that David Jekyl did not sweep the dead leaves from the garden paths? You may look at almost the same scene now, save that the signs of winter instead of autumn are on the ground. Mrs. Hastings is not there, but the rector and David Jekyl are. The rector is shivering over a handful of fire in the room, and David outside is sweeping the snow from the paths.

When poverty comes in at the door, sickness very frequently creeps in after it. Whether it was that (though perhaps the word poverty is not precisely the correct one to apply to All Souls' rectory), or whether it was the grief which the summer and George Godolphin had brought them, certain it was, that both Mr. and Mrs. Hastings had been for some time ailing. Mrs. Hastings had been urged by some friends, residing about forty miles off, to visit them for a little change; it would set her up for the winter, they urged; and she had at length yielded, and went to them about three days ago. She should remain but a few days, she said; for she could not afford to be away from Maria in the last week or two of the latter's stay at Prior's Ash. No sooner had Mrs. Hastings left, than it appeared to be the rector's turn to get ill; an influenza cold, which had been hovering over him, grew worse. His own private opinion was, that he had laid its foundation at Thomas Godolphin's funeral, when he had stood bareheaded in the drizzling rain, and that it had since been smouldering within him.

He sat over the fire, shivering and shaking. It was not the substantial fire that you see in a grate where circumstances are easy and coals plentiful; but a very sparing fire indeed; and the rector now extended his hands to the blaze, and now turned his gray face to glance at David Jekyl. He had persisted in doctoring his cold himself, but it seemed to get no better, and Rose had at length prevailed on him to send for Mr. Snow.

Rose was an efficient mistress of the house in the absence of her mother. Capability nearly always comes with the necessity for it: and it was proving so in the case of Rose Hastings. They kept but one servant now, and many household duties fell to Rose's share; she taught the little Chisholm girls, and kept them as quiet as she could. It was hard that these troubles should have fallen on the rector in his old age: his home made into a school, his household deprived of most of its comforts, his sons and daughters' prospects destroyed. Isaac was toiling at his clerkship in London, Reginald in his hard life at sea, Harry as an usher in a school. Perhaps the only one to whom it had made no daily home difference was Grace. You may have thought him an unchristian minister, in saying he could not bring his mind to forgive George Godolphin, but I think a great many more of us, ministers or not ministers, would have said the same, not being hypocrites.

Mr. Hastings sat over the fire dreamily watching David Jekyl, awaiting the visit of Mr. Snow, and thinking his own thoughts. David had got a bit of crape on his old felt hat for his recently interred father: perhaps the officiating at the old man's burial, and standing in the bleak churchyard,—though it did not either rain or snow,—had not mended the rector's cold. He might have procured a friend to take the service for him, but Mr. Hastings was one who would never shrink from his duty so long as there was a possibility of his performing it. The crape on David's hat led the rector's thoughts to the old man, and thence to the deprivation brought to the old man's years, the loss to the sons, through George Godolphin. How many more, besides poor old Jekyl, had George Godolphin ruined!—himself, that reverend clergyman, amongst the rest!

"A good thing when the country shall be rid of him!" spoke the rector, in his bitterness. "I would give all the comfort left in my life that Maria,

for her own sake, had not linked her fate with his! But that can't be remedied now. I hope he will make her happier there, in her new home, than he has made her here!"

By which words you will gather that Mr. Hastings had no suspicion of the change in his daughter's state. It was so. Lord and Lady Averil were not alone in learning the tidings suddenly,—at, as may be said, the eleventh hour. Maria had not sent word to the rectory that she was worse. She knew that her mother was absent, that her father was ill, that Rose was occupied; and the change from bad to worse had come upon herself so imperceptibly, that she saw not its real danger,—as was proved by her not writing for her husband. The rector, as he sits there, has his mind full of Maria's voyage and its discomforts; of her changed life in hot India: and he is saying to himself that he shall get out in the afternoon and call to see her.

The room faced the side of the house, but as Mr. Hastings sat, he could catch a glimpse of the garden-gate, and presently he saw the well-known gig stop at it, and the surgeon descend.

"Well, and who's ill now?" cried Mr. Snow, as he let himself in at the hall-door, and Rose advanced to meet him. "Mrs. Hastings is not back, is she, Miss Rose?"

"It is papa who is not well, Mr. Snow. He is very poorly. I wished him to send for you yesterday, but he would not."

Mr. Snow went into the room and took a seat in front of the rector, examined into his ailments, and gossiped at the same time, as was his wont,—gossiped and grumbled.

"Ah, yes; just so: feel worse than you have felt for twenty years. Well, Mr. Hastings, you have only yourself to thank. If you won't keep yourself in health, you can't expect health to keep with you of its own accord."

"How am I to keep myself in health more than I do?"

"How! Why, by taking care of

yourself; by living a little bit up to the mark. Here have you been putting yourself upon half-diet: what can you expect but that any little ailments will find you out, when you have not strength to throw them off?"

"I have not put myself upon half-diet," said Mr. Hastings.

"Pooh! As if I didn't know! You take as much as you want to eat perhaps in quantity, but in quality—what d'you say to that? You used to drink a glass of good ale with your dinner and a glass of good wine after it, and your table was in accordance with such moderate luxury: now it's cold mutton and small-beer. What do you expect can come of it, I say? A man may go through life without these things and be in perfect health; but a man who has been accustomed to take them cannot leave them off with impunity when he gets to your years."

"Suppose he is forced?—as I am. You know what I have to do now with my income, Snow, just as well as I know it. Necessaries we must have; luxuries for us are over. It is of no use talking nonsense or reverting to old times: I can hardly make both ends meet. The breaking of that bank was a comprehensive calamity, and I only suffer with the stream. Some are worse off than I."

"You had better go to bed and stop there till you are better, and live upon water-gruel the while," retorted Mr. Snow. "Where's the use of sending for me if you won't do what I tell you?"

"I'll take some wine if it is necessary now, if you mean that: but as to taking it as a regular beverage two or three glasses a day, it's out of the question. I happened to be just out of wine when that shock came, and to purchase a fresh stock is beyond me. Good wine demands its own price, and the bad is good for nobody, sick or well. Many a time have I given a bottle from my cellar to a poor sick man, that he might not poison himself with the cheap rubbish sold out in pints to the poor."

Nobody knew that better than the

surgeon. He had given his advice and medicine; the rector his wine and his counsel. Neither of them could look back on his life, and reproach himself with not having done his duty.

"I suppose you are not serious in your advice about my going to bed," resumed the rector. "Because I shall not take it. I am not so ill as all that comes to; and I shall want to go out this afternoon."

"In this snow!"

"It does not snow now. I don't think it will snow again to-day. And weather does not hurt me; I am accustomed to be out in it."

"Why, you have just told me that you think you caught this cold over Mr. Godolphin's grave!"

"I think I did. I felt it coming on in my head the next day. I could not read the service in my hat, Snow, over him, and you know the rain was falling. Ah! there was another sufferer! But for the calamity that fell upon him, he might not have gone to the grave quite so soon."

"He felt it too keenly," remarked Mr. Snow. "And your daughter—there's another sad victim. Ah me! sometimes I wish I had never been a doctor, when I find all I can do in the way of treatment comes to naught."

"If she can only get well through the fatigues of the voyage, she may be better in India. Don't you think so? The very change from this place will put new life in her."

Mr. Snow paused. "Of whom are you speaking, Mr. Hastings?"

"Of my daughter," was the answer, slight surprise in the tone. "George Godolphin's wife."

The truth flashed on the mind of the surgeon,—that Mr. Hastings was as yet in ignorance of Maria's state of danger; and flashed with pain. Of course it was his duty to enlighten him, and he would rather have been spared the task. "When did you see her last?" he inquired.

"The day Mrs. Hastings left. I have not been well enough to go out much since. And I dare say Maria has been busy."

"I am sorry then to have to tell you that she has not been busy; that she has not been well enough to be busy. She is much worse."

There was a significance in the tone that spoke to the father more effectually than any words could have done. He was silent for a full minute, and then he rose from his chair and walked once up and down the room before he turned to Mr. Snow.

"The full truth, Snow. Tell it me."

"Well—the truth is, that hope is over. That she will not very long be here. I had no suspicion but that you knew it."

"I knew nothing of it; none of us knew of it. When I and her mother were with her last; it was, I tell you, the day Mrs. Hastings left; Maria was talking of going back to London with her husband the next time he came down to Prior's Ash. I thought her looking better that morning; she had quite a color; she was in good spirits. When did you see her?"

"Now. I went up there before I came down to you. She gets worse and worse with every hour. Lord Averil telegraphed for George Godolphin last night: I met him coming to inquire after her, and he told me so."

"And I have not been informed of this!" burst forth the rector. "My daughter dying—for I infer no less—and I to be left in ignorance!"

"Nay," said Mr. Snow, "I tell you I did not suppose but you were aware of it. I know you, or some of you, are often there."

"But it happens—it just happens that none of us have been there since my wife's departure," returned Mr. Hastings, his tone changing to a wail. "Rose could not well get out, and I have been ill. I never cast a thought to her being worse. Why did she not send us word? What can Margery be about?"

"Understand one thing, Mr. Hastings,—that until this morning, we saw no fear of *immediate* danger. Lord Averil says he suspected it last night. I did not see her yesterday in the after-

part of the day. I have known some few cases precisely similar to Mrs. George Godolphin's, where danger and death seem to have come suddenly on together."

"And what is her disease?"

The surgeon threw up his arms. "I don't know,—unless the trouble has fretted her into her grave. Were I not a doctor, I might say she had died of a broken heart, but the faculty don't recognize such a thing."

Half an hour afterwards, the Rev. Mr. Hastings was hanging over his daughter's dying-bed. A dying-bed it too surely looked; and if Mr. Hastings had indulged a gleam of hope, the first glance at Maria's countenance dispelled it. She lay wrapped in a shawl, the lace border of her night-cap shading her delicate face and its smooth brown hair, her eyes larger and softer and sweeter than of yore.

They were alone together. He held her hand in his; he gently laid his other hand on her white and wasted brow. "Child! child! why did you not send to me?"

"I did not know I was so ill, papa," she panted. "I seem to have got so much worse this last night. But I am better than I was an hour ago."

"Maria," he gravely said, "are you aware that,—that you are in a state of danger?—that death may supervene?"

"Yes, papa, I know it. I have seen it coming a long while,—only I was not quite sure."

"And, my dear child, are you——" Mr. Hastings paused. He paused and bit his lips, gathering firmness to suppress the emotion that was rising. His calling made him familiar with death-bed scenes; but Maria was his own child, and nature will assert her supremacy. A minute or two and he was himself again: not a man living was more given to reticence in the matter of his own feelings than the rector of All Souls': he could not bear to betray emotion in the sight of his fellow-men.

"Are you prepared for death, Ma-

ria? Can you look upon it without terror?"

"I think I am," she murmured. "I feel that I am going to God. Oh, papa, forgive, forgive me!" she exclaimed, bursting into tears of emotion as she raised her arms to him in the moment's excitement. "The trouble has been too much for me; I could not shake it off. All the sorrow that has been brought upon you through us, I think of it always: my heart aches with thinking of it. Oh, papa, forgive me before I die! It was not my fault; indeed I did not know of it. Papa,"—and the sobs became painfully hysterical, and Mr. Hastings strove in vain to check them,—“I would have sacrificed my life to bring good to you and my dear mamma; I would have sold myself to keep this ill from you!"

"Child, hush! There has been nothing to forgive to you. In the first moment of the smart, if I cast an unkind thought to you, it did not last; it was gone almost as soon as it came. My dear child, you have ever been my loving and dutiful daughter. Maria, shall I tell it you?—I know not why, but I have loved you better than any of my other children."

She had raised herself from the pillow and was clasping his hand to her bosom, sobbing over it. Few daughters have loved a father as Maria had loved and venerated hers. The rector's face was preternaturally pale and calm, the effect of his powerfully-suppressed emotion.

"It has been too much for me, papa. I have thought of your trouble, of the discomforts of your home, of the blighted prospects of my brothers, feeling that it was our work. I thought of it always, more perhaps than of other things; and I could not battle with the pain it brought, and it has killed me. But, papa, I am resigned to go: I know that I shall be better off. Before these troubles came, I had not learned to think of God; and I should have been afraid to die."

"It is through tribulation that we

must enter the kingdom," interposed the calm, earnest voice of the clergyman. "It must come to us here in some shape or other, my child; and I do not see that it signifies how, or when, or through whom it does come, if it takes us to a better world. You have had your share of it: but God is a just and merciful judge, and if he has given you a full share of sorrow, he will deal out to you his full recompense."

"Yes," she gently said, "I am going to God. Will you pray for me, papa?—that he will pardon me and take me for Christ's sake. Oh, papa! it seems,—it seems when we get near death as if the other world were so very near to this! It seems but such a little span of time that I shall have to wait for you all before you come to me. Will you give my dear love to mamma if I should not live to see her, and say how I have loved her,—say that I have but gone on first,—that I shall be there ready for her. Papa, I dare say God will let me be ever waiting and looking for you all."

Mr. Hastings turned to search for a Book of Common Prayer. He saw Maria's on her dressing-table,—one which he had given her on her marriage, and written her name in,—and he opened it at the "Visitation of the Sick." He looked searchingly at her face as he returned: surely the signs of death were already gathering there!

"The last Sacrament, Maria?" he whispered. "When shall I come?"

"This evening," she answered. "George will be here then."

The Reverend Mr. Hastings bent his eyebrows with a frown, as if he thought—But no matter. "At eight o'clock, then," he said to Maria, as he laid the book upon the bed and knelt down before it. Maria lay back on her pillow, and clasping her hands upon the shawl which covered her bosom, closed her eyes to listen.

It was strange that even then, as he was in the very act of kneeling, certain words which he had spoken to Maria years ago, should flash vividly

into the rector's mind,—words which had referred to the death of Ethel Grame :

“The time may come, Maria—we none of us know what is before us—when some of you young ones who are left, may wish you had died as she has. Many a one, battling for very existence with the world's carking cares, wails out a vain wish that he had been taken from the evil to come.”

Had the gift of prevision been on the rector of All Souls' when he spoke those words to Maria Hastings? Poor child! lying there now on her early death-bed,—with her broken heart! The world's carking cares had surely done their work on Maria Godolphin!

CHAPTER LXX.

A CROWD OF MEMORIES.

BUT for mismanagement how smoothly things might go on! That a great deal of mismanagement does exist in the world is certain; and it is equally certain that much of it might be avoided with a little care. That telegraphic dispatch which Lord Averil had deemed well to send, and which had not been sent any too soon, did not reach George Godolphin for hours and hours.

It was taken to his lodgings between nine and ten at night, some two hours after the dispatching of it by Lord Averil. A delay there, you will say, but that, as it proved, was of no consequence: had it flown up on the wings of the wind, been delivered at the same moment that it left Prior's Ash, George would not have had it.

George that day had gone out to dinner. He had made acquaintance with the agents of the Calcutta house, and had accepted a dinner engagement with one of them at his country residence, a few miles from town. Consequently when the dispatch arrived there was nobody to receive it but

George's landlady, a worthy old person who, as the saying runs, had seen better days, and never thought she should have to let rooms for a living.

Now Mrs. Clark, for that was her name, had an invincible horror of telegraphic dispatches. She had never received but two in her life: the one had told her of the drowning by accident of her only son; the other of the sudden death of her husband. Rather confused in her association of cause and effect, it was perhaps natural that she should henceforth connect these dispatches with every kind of imaginative ill, and loudly express her conviction that the greatest bane ever invented for society was the electric telegraph.

The man arrived at her door with the dispatch, and the servant went to her mistress. “A telegram come for Mr. George Godolphin, mum; sixpence to pay, and a book to sign.”

Mrs. Clark was struck nearly dumb with terror. For some minutes she flatly refused to touch it or to sign the book; and she and the man, who was called in, had a wordy argument. At length the man managed to get the signature and the sixpence, and he went out, leaving the dispatch on the table.

“There's a death in it, Betsey, as sure as that we are here!” observed Mrs. Clark, gazing at it as it lay, but not taking it in her hands.

Betsey was dubious. “In my last place, mum, a gentleman used to have them telegrams continual, and they could have had nothing but fun in 'em, by the way he'd laugh over 'em.”

“Take it up-stairs, Betsey, and put it on Mr. Godolphin's dressing-table,” was her mistress's order. “Don't put it in too conspicuous a place, for his eyes to light on it all at once; hide it partially, and we'll prepare him a little, poor gentleman, before he goes up.”

Betsey obeyed orders to the letter. Naturally an obedient servant, as servants run, she was also willing to spare pain—if there was pain to be spared—to Mr. George Godolphin. George had a pleasant manner to those who waited on him. Poor though he

now was, he had also a generous hand; and Betsey believed there could not be such a gentleman as he in all the world. She stood before the dressing-table, and looked about for a place "not too conspicuous," trying various situations to leave it in. Finally she put it flat on the white toilette-cover, and placed his glass shaving-pot upon it, so that only the sides of the dispatch could be seen beyond.

And Mrs. Clark herself sat up to warn him. She believed, considerate old lady, that nobody could accomplish that delicate mission with the skill that she could,—warn him sufficiently and yet not frighten him,—and she sat up in her good nature to do it.

It was past eleven when George came in. She hastened out of the parlor and caught him as he was lighting his candle, which was placed ready on the mahogany slab.

"There's something come for you to-night, sir; I paid sixpence. Not a letter, something else. You'll see it on your dressing-table, sir. I have had it placed there, and I thought I'd sit up to tell you of it before you went up yourself."

"Thank you, ma'am," replied George.

He bounded up the stairs and entered his sitting-room, giving not a second thought to the communication of Mrs. Clark. That it could be a telegraphic dispatch from home never so much as crossed his imagination. The poor old lady's considerate caution had defeated its own ends. If she had but spoken out! George was in the height of his preparations for departure, and parcels and letters were arriving for him continually. Two letters which had come by the evening post were on the mantelpiece. He stayed to read them and then went into his bedroom.

Now, it happened that a small parcel had also come for George that evening, and had been placed by Betsey on his dressing-table. The fact was not known to Mrs. Clark, and had probably been forgotten by the girl herself. But as George laid down his

candle his eyes fell on this small parcel: and what more natural than that he should suppose it was the "something" alluded to by Mrs. Clark? He did suppose it, and he wondered at the old lady's intimation of having "sat up to tell him of it," but he let it slip from his mind.

George tore the paper that inclosed the parcel, and found it to contain a specimen necktie which he had ordered to be sent. After that he went to bed, never having seen the dispatch so quietly lying there.

Winter mornings are dark, very dark in London; and nine o'clock had struck before George had rung for his shaving water. It was brought, and in taking up the glass pot George for the first time saw what was under it. "Halloa!" he cried.

He tore it open; he read the ominous words from Viscount Averil. In another moment he was shouting down the stairs, astonishing Betsey, alarming Mrs. Clark, who came out of an upper room in a night-cap.

"When did this dispatch come? Why was I not told of it?"

Alas! of what use was the explanation now?—that he *had* been told of it, if he could but have understood. Of what use to reproach Mrs. Clark?—it could not recall the wasted hours; and the old lady had done her best according to her feeble judgment.

Without the loss of an unnecessary moment, without breakfast, George Godolphin hastened to the railway station, and found himself just in time to miss an express train that would have carried him direct to Prior's Ash. Chafing at the delay he was condemned to, at his own impatience, at the misapprehension with regard to the dispatch, chafing at the general state of things altogether, George could only bend to circumstances, and he did not arrive at Prior's Ash until three o'clock in the afternoon.

The first person he saw at the terminus was Lord Averil. That nobleman, wondering at George's non-appearance, believing that Maria was getting nearer to death with every

hour, had come to the conclusion that by some mischance his message had miscarried; and he had now gone to the station to send another. Lord Averil linked his arm within George's, and they walked rapidly away through the snow that lay on the path.

Yes, he, the Viscount Averil, Peer of the Realm, linked his arm with George Godolphin's, who had so very near been held up to the virtuous British public as a candidate for a free passage to Australia. Somehow, George had slipped through that danger and was a gentleman still: moreover, he was Lord Averil's brother-in-law, and it was the earnest wish of that nobleman that general society should forget that little mistake in George's life as heartily as he did. He explained as he walked along: that Maria had got rapidly worse all at once; that it was only within a few hours that immediate danger had shown itself.

Still, George could not understand it. He had left his wife sick, certainly, but not, as he believed, seriously ill; he had supposed her to be busy in her preparations for the voyage: and now to be told that she was dying! No, George could not understand it, and scarcely believed it. If this was so, why had Maria not sent for him before?

Lord Averil was unable to give him more explanatory information. It was only the evening before that Cecil had called upon her, called accidentally, and learned it, he said. It was only that morning, as Lord Averil had now heard, that Mr. Hastings and his family had learned it. Until that morning, nay until an hour or two ago, Maria herself had not imagined the danger to be so near: and she heartily thanked Lord Averil for having had the forethought to telegraph.

"Snow must have known it," remonstrated George.

"I think not. I was talking to him to-day, and he expressed his surprise at the disorder's having suddenly increased in this rapid manner."

"What is the disorder?" asked

George. "My wife had no disorder—except weakness."

"I suppose that is it—weakness."

"But weakness does not kill!"

"Yes it does. Sometimes."

Margery was standing at the door when they reached the gate, possibly looking out for her master, for she knew the hours of the arrivals of the train. The windows of the sitting-room faced that way, and George's eyes naturally turned on them. But there was no sign of busy life, of everyday occupation, the curtains hung in their undisturbed folds, the blinds were partially down.

"I will just ask how your wife is now, and whether Cecil is here," said Lord Averil, following George up the path.

No, Lady Averil and Miss Bessy Godolphin had left about ten minutes before, Margery said. My Lady Godolphin, who had drove up in her carriage and come in for a quarter of an hour, she had left; and Miss Rose Hastings, who had been there the best part of the morning, had also left. Mrs. George Godolphin seemed a trifle better, inclined to sleep, tired out, as it were; and she, Margery, didn't wonder at it with such a heap of visitors: she had give 'em a broad hint herself that her mistress might be all the better for an hour's quiet.

Lord Averil departed. George flung his railway-wrapper on a chair and hung his hat up in the little hall: he turned his face, one of severity then, on Margery.

"Is your mistress so very ill?"

"I don't see that she can be much worse, sir. When Mr. Snow went out just now he said she was better. She is better than she was in the morning, or she couldn't be sitting up."

"And now, Margery, why was I not sent for earlier? The blame must lie with you."

"I can't help it, sir: you must blame me if you will. Why, Mr. George," she continued, raising her voice in a tone of defence, "if I had had a thought that she was coming on

to be like this, do you suppose I should not have sent? Yesterday morning, when she was worse, I said master ought to be writ to, and she said she'd write herself. She did write, but she didn't get it ready till evening, and my Lord Averil, he telegraphed. It is only this morning, sir, that downright danger has come on."

"She cannot be so very ill as they would imply; she cannot be beyond hope," he cried, in an impassioned tone.

"Well, sir, I don't know," answered Margery, willing perhaps to soothe the facts to him by degrees, as Mrs. Clark had been by the telegraphic message. "She is certainly better than she was in the morning. She is sitting up."

George Godolphin was of a hopeful nature. Even those few words seemed to speak to his heart with a certainty. "Not there, sir," interposed Margery, as he opened the door of the sitting-room. "But it don't matter," she added: "you can go in that way."

He walked through the room and opened that of the bedchamber. Would the scene ever leave his memory? The room was lighted more by the blaze of the fire than by the daylight, for curtains partially covered the windows and the winter's dreary afternoon was already merging into twilight. The bed was at the far end of the room, the dressing-table near it. The fire was on his right as he entered, and on a white-covered sofa, drawn before it, sat Maria. She was partially dressed and wrapped in a light cashmere shawl; her cap was untied, and her face, shaded though it was by its brown hair, was all too visible in the reflection cast by the fire-light.

Which was the most colorless,—that face, or the white cover of the sofa? George Godolphin's heart stood still as he looked upon it and then bounded on with a rushing leap. Every shadow of hope had gone out of him.

Maria had not heard him, did not see him; he went in gently. By her side on the sofa lay Miss Meta, curled

up into a ball and fast asleep, her hands and her golden curls on her mamma's knee. With George's first step forward, Maria turned her sad, sweet eyes towards him, and a faint cry of emotion escaped her lips.

Before she could stir or speak, George was with her, his protecting arms thrown round her, her face gathered to his breast. What a contrast it was! she so wan and fragile, so near the grave, he in all his manly strength, his fresh beauty. Miss Meta woke up, recognized her papa with a cry and much commotion, but Margery came in and carried her off, shutting the door behind her.

Her fair young face,—too fair and young to die,—was laid against her husband's; her feeble hand lay caressingly in his. The shock to George was very great; it almost seemed that he had already lost her; and the scalding tears, so rarely wrung from man, coursed down his cheeks and fell on her face.

"Don't grieve," she whispered, the tears raining from her own eyes. "Oh, George, my husband, it is a bitter thing to part, but we shall meet again in heaven, and be together forever. It has been so weary here; the troubles have been so great!"

He steadied his voice to speak. "The troubles have not killed you, have they, Maria?"

"Yes, I suppose it has been so. I did try and struggle against them, but,—I don't know,—Oh, George!" she broke out in a wailing tone of pain, "if I could but have got over them and lived!—if I could but have gone with you to your new home!"

George sat down on the sofa where Meta had been, and held her to him in silence. She could hear his heart beat; could feel it bounding against her side.

"It will be a better home in heaven," she resumed, laying her poor pale face upon his shoulder. "You will come to me there, George; I shall but go on first a little while; all the pains and the cares, the heart-burnings of earth will be forgotten, and we shall

be together in happiness forever and ever."

He dropped his face upon her neck, he sobbed aloud in his anguish. Whatever may have been his gracelessness and his faults, he had loved his wife; and now that he was losing her that love was greater than it had ever been: some pricks of conscience may have been mingled with it, too! Who knows?

"Don't forget me quite when I am gone, George. Think of me sometimes as your poor wife who loved you to the last: who would have stayed with you if God had let her. When first I began to see that it must be, that I should leave you and Meta, my heart nearly broke: but the pain has grown less, and I think God has been reconciling me to it."

"What shall I do?—what will the child do without you?" broke from his quivering lips.

Perhaps the thought crossed Maria that he had done very well without her in the last few months, for his sojourns with her might be counted by hours instead of by days: but she was too generous to allude to it; and the heartaching had passed. "Cecil and Lord Averil will take Meta," she said. "Let her stay with them, George! It would not be well for her to go to India alone with you."

The words surprised him. He did not speak.

"Cecil proposed it yesterday. They will be glad to have her. I dare say Lord Averil will speak to you about it later. It was the one great weight left upon my mind, George,—our poor child, and what could be done with her: Cecil's generous proposal removed it."

"Yes," said George, hesitatingly. "For a little while; perhaps it will be the best thing. Until I shall get settled in India. But she must come to me then; I cannot part with her for good."

"For good? No. But, George, you may,—it is possible,"—she seemed to stammer and hesitate,—"you may be forming new ties. In that case

you would care less for the loss of Meta——"

"Don't talk so!" he passionately interrupted. "How can you glance to such things, Maria, in these our last moments?"

She was silent for a few minutes, weeping softly. "Had this parting come upon me as suddenly as it has upon you, I might have started from the very thought with horror: but, George, I have had nothing else in my own mind for weeks but the parting, and it has made me look at the future as I could not else have looked at it. Do not blame me for saying this: I must allude to it, if I am to speak of Meta. I can understand how full of aversion the thought is to you now: but, George, it may come to pass."

"I think not," he said, and his voice and manner had changed to grave deliberation. "If I know anything of myself, Maria, I shall never again marry."

"It is not impossible."

"No," he assented, "it is not impossible."

Her heart beat a shade quicker, and she hid her face upon him so that he could not see it. When she spoke again, it was with difficulty he could catch the whispered words.

"I know how foolish and wrong it is for a dying wife to extract any promise of this nature from her husband: were I to say to you, Do not again marry, it would be little else than a wicked request; and it would prove how my thoughts and passions must still cling to earth. Bear with me while I speak of this, George: I am not going to be so wicked: but,—but——"

Agitation stopped her voice. Her bosom heaved, her breath nearly left her, and she had to catch it in gasps. He saw that this was mental emotion, not bodily weakness; and he waited until it should pass, stroking the hair from her brow with his gentle hand.

"My darling, what is it?"

"But there is one promise that I do wish to beg of you," she resumed,

mastering her emotion sufficiently to speak. "If—if you should marry, and your choice falls upon *one*—upon *her*—then, in that case, do not seek to have Meta home; let her remain always with Cecil."

A pause: broken by George. "Of whom do you speak, Maria?"

The same laboring of the breath; the same cruel agitation; and they had to be fought with before she could bring out the words.

"Of Charlotte Pain."

"Charlotte Pain!" echoed George, shouting out the name in surprise.

"I could not bear it," she shivered. "George, George! do not make her the second mother of my child! I could not bear it; it seems to me that I could not even in my grave bear it! Should you marry her, promise me that Meta shall not be removed from Ashlydyat."

"Maria," he quietly said, "I shall never marry Charlotte Pain."

"You don't know. You may think now you will not, but you cannot answer for yourself. George! she has helped to kill me. She must not be Meta's second mother."

He raised her face so that he could see it: his dark blue eyes met hers searchingly, and he took her hand in his as he gravely spoke.

"She will never be Meta's second mother: nay, if it will be more satisfactory, I will say she never shall be. By the heaven that perhaps even I may some day attain to, I say it. Charlotte Pain will never be Meta's second mother, or my wife: and I affirm it in the presence of God."

She did not answer in words. She only nestled a little nearer to him in gratitude,—half in repentance, perhaps, for having doubted him. George resumed in the same grave tone.

"And now, Maria, tell me what you mean by saying that Charlotte Pain has helped to kill you."

A crimson flush came over her wan face, and she contrived to turn it from him again, so that her eyes were hidden. But she did not speak quite at first.

"It all came upon me together, George," she murmured at length, her tone one of loving tenderness, in token that she was not angry now; that the past, whatever may have been its sins against her, any or none, was forgiven. "At that cruel time when the blow fell, when I had nowhere to turn to for comfort, then I also learnt what Prior's Ash had been saying, about—about Charlotte Pain. George, it seemed to wither my very heart; to take the life out of it. I had so loved you; I had so trusted you; and to find—to find—that you loved her, not me——"

"Hush!" thundered George, in his emotion. "I never *loved* any but you, Maria. I swear it."

"Well—well. It seems that I do not understand it. I—I could not get over it," she continued, passing her hand across her brow where the old aching pain had come momentarily again, "and I fear it has helped to kill me. It was so cruel, to have suffered me to know her all the while."

George Godolphin compressed his lips. He never spoke.

"But, George, it is over; it is buried in the past; and I did not intend to mention it. I should not have mentioned it but for speaking of Meta. Oh, let it go; let it pass; it need not disturb our last hour together."

"It appears to have disturbed you a great deal more than it need have done," he said, a shade of anger in his tone.

"Yes, looking back, I see it did. When we come to the closing scene of life, as I have come, this world shutting itself to our view, the next opening, then we see how foolish in many things we have been; how worse than vain our poor earthly passions. So to have fretted ourselves over this little space of existence with its passing follies, its temporary interests, when we might have been living and looking for that great one that shall last forever! To gaze back on my life, it seems but a little span,—a worthless hour compared with the eternity that I am

entering upon. Oh, George, we have all need of God's loving forgiveness! I, as well as you. I did not mean to reproach you: but I *could* not bear—had you made her your second wife—that she should have had the training of Meta.”

Did George Godolphin doubt whether the fear were wholly erased from her heart? Perhaps so: or he might not have spoken to her as he was about to speak.

“Let me set your mind further at rest, Maria. Had I ever so great an inclination to marry Mrs. Pain, it is impossible that I could do so. Mrs. Pain has a husband already.”

Maria raised her face, a flashing light, as of joy, illumining it. George saw it: and a sad, dreamy look of self-condemnation settled on his own. *Had* it so stabbed her. “Is she married again?—since she left Prior's Ash?”

“She has never been a widow, Maria,” he answered. “Rodolf Pain, her husband, did not die.”

“He did not die?”

“As it appears. He is now back again in England.”

“And did you know of this?”

“Only since his return. I supposed her to be a widow, as everybody else supposed it. One night last summer, in quitting Ashlydyat, I came upon them both in the grounds, Mr. and Mrs. Pain; and I then learned, to my very great surprise, that he, whom his wife had passed off as dead, had in point of fact been in hiding abroad. There was some unpleasant mystery attached to it, the details of which I have not concerned myself to inquire into. He fell into trouble I expect, and feared his own country was too hot for him. However it may have been, he is home again, and with her. I suppose the danger is removed, for I met them together in Piccadilly last week walking openly, and they told me they were looking out for a house.”

She breathed a sobbing sigh of relief, as one hears sometimes from a little child.

“But were Mrs. Pain the widow

she assumed to be, she would never have been made my wife. Child!” he added, in momentary irritation; “don't you understand things better? *She* my wife!—the second mother, the trainer of Meta! What could you be thinking of? Men do not marry women such as Charlotte Pain.”

“Then you do not care for her so very much?”

“I care for her so much, Maria, that were I never to see her or hear of her again it would not give me one moment's thought,” he impulsively cried. “I'd give a great deal now not to have kept up our acquaintance with the woman—if that had saved you one single iota of pain.”

When these earthly scenes are closing,—when the grave is about to set its seal on one to whom we could have saved pain, and did not,—when heaven's solemn approach is to be seen, and heaven's purity has become all too clear to our own sight, what would we give to change inflicted wrongs,—to blot out the hideous past! George Godolphin sat by the side of his dying wife, his best-beloved in life as she would be in death, and bit his lips in his crowd of memories, in his unavailing repentance. Ah, my friends! these moments of reprisal, prolonged as they may seem, must come to us in the end. It is a charming thing no doubt to ignore them in our hot-blooded carelessness, but the time will come when they find us out.

He, George Godolphin, had leisure to hug them to himself, and make the best and the worst of them. Maria, exhausted with the excitement, as much as by her own state of weakness, closed her eyes as she lay upon his breast, and dropped into a sleep, and he sat watching her face, holding her to him, not daring to move lest he should disturb her, not daring even to lift a finger and wipe off his own bitter and unavailing tears.

Yes, there could be no doubt of the fact,—that the troubles of one kind and another had been too much for her; that she was dying of them; and he felt the truth to his heart's

core. He felt that she, that delicate, refined, sensitive woman, had been the very last who should have been treated rudely. You may remember it was observed at the beginning of her history that she was one unfit to battle with the world's sharp storms. It had now proved so. Charlotte Pain would have braved them, whatever their nature, have weathered them jauntily on a prancing saddle-horse. Maria had sunk down, crushed with their weight. Il y a—let me once more repeat it!—il y a des femmes et des femmes.

CHAPTER LXXI.

GRACE AKEMAN'S REPENTANCE.

THERE came one with hurried steps up the garden path, with hurried steps and a distressed, anxious countenance: passing Margery in the passage, passing Meta, she bore on as if no power on earth should stop her, and entered the sick-chamber.

It was Grace, Mrs. Akeman. This sudden change in the illness of Maria had certainly come at an inopportune time. Mrs. Hastings was out for a week, Grace had gone out for the day with her husband some miles into the country. A messenger was sent to her, and it brought her home.

It brought her home with a self-condemning conscience. Maria dying!—when Grace had only thought of her as going flaunting off to India; when she had that very day remarked to her husband, as they drove along the snowy road in his four-wheeled chaise stuffed full behind with architectural plans, that some people had all the luck of it in this world, and that Mr. and Mrs. George Godolphin, she supposed, would soon be swaying it in the Bengal presidency, as they had swayed it in Prior's Ash. Maria dying! dying of the trouble, the sorrow, the disgrace, the humiliation, the neg-

lect! dying of a broken heart! It came flashing into Grace Akeman's mind that she *might* have taken a different view of her conduct; have believed in the wrongs of wives, who are bound to their husbands for worse as well as for better,—it came into her mind that she might have accorded her a little sisterly sympathy instead of reproach.

She came in now brimming over with repentance; she came in with a sort of belief that things could not have gone so very far; that there must be some remedy still; some hope; and that if she, Grace, exerted her energies to arouse Maria, health and life would come again. It was terrible ill-luck which had taken her out of Prior's Ash that particular day. Mr. Akeman had told her she had better not accompany him as the snow had come, but she had laid her plans previously to go, and Grace was one to take her own will. And so, what with the tardiness of the messenger, and what with the snow, the evening shades were over the earth before she got back to Prior's Ash.

Maria had awoke out of her temporary slumber then, and George was standing with his arm on the mantel-piece. A half-frown crossed his brow when he saw Grace enter. He had never liked her; he was conscious that she had not been kind to Maria, and he deemed her severe manner and tart voice scarcely suitable to that dying-chamber. But she was his wife's sister, and he advanced to welcome her.

Grace did not see his welcome; would not see it. Perhaps in truth she was wholly absorbed by the sight which met her view in Maria. Remedy still?—hope yet? Ah no! death was there, was upon her, and Grace burst into tears. Maria held out her hand, a smile lighting up her wan countenance.

"I thought you were not coming to see me, Grace."

"I was out. I went to Hamlet's Wood this morning with Mr. Ake-

man," sobbed Grace. "Whatever is the reason that you have suddenly grown so ill as this?"

"I have been growing ill a long time," was Maria's answer.

"But there must be hope!" said Grace, in her quick way. "Mr. George Godolphin,"—turning to him and dashing away the tears on her cheeks, as if she would not betray them to him,—*"surely there must be hope! What do the medical men say?"*

"There is no hope, Grace," interposed Maria, in her low, feeble voice. "The medical men know there is not. Dr. Beale came with Mr. Snow at mid-day; but their coming at all is a mere form now."

Grace untied her bonnet and sat down. "I thought," said she, "you were getting well."

Maria made a slight motion of dissent. "I have not thought it myself; not really thought it. I hoped it might be so, and the hope prevented my speaking; but there was always an under-current of conviction to the contrary in my heart."

George looked at her, half-reproachfully. She understood the look, and answered it.

"I wish now I had told you, George; but I was not sure. And if I had spoken you would only have laughed at me then in disbelief."

"You speak very calmly, Maria," said Grace, with passionate earnestness. "Have you no regret at leaving us?"

A faint hectic shone suddenly in Maria's cheek. "Regret!" she repeated with emotion, "my days have been one long regret,—one long, wearying pain. Don't you see it is the pain that has killed me, Grace? But it is over now, through God's mercy," she added, in a calmer tone. "The bitterness of death has passed."

Grace's temper was sharp, her sense of right and wrong cynically keen. The rector had had the same sharp temper in his youth, but he had learned to control it; Grace had not. She turned her flashing eyes, her flaming cheeks, on George Godolphin.

"Do you hear,—the pain has killed her? Who brought that pain upon her? Mr. George Godolphin, I wish you joy of your conscience! I almost seemed to foresee it,—I almost seemed to foresee this," she passionately cried, "ere ever my sister married you."

"Don't, Grace!" wailed Maria, a faint cry of fear escaping her, a sudden terror taking possession of her raised face. "George, George!"

She held out her hands yearningly to him, as if she would shield him, or as if she wanted him to shield her from the sharp words. George crossed over to her with his protecting presence, and bent to catch her whisper praying him for peace.

"You forget your sister's state when you thus speak, Mrs. Akeman," he gravely said. "Say any thing you please to me later,—you shall have the opportunity if you desire it,—but in my wife's presence there must be peace."

Grace flung off the shawl which she had worn, and stood beating the toe of her boot upon the fender, her throat swelling, her chest heaving with the effort of subduing her emotion. What with her anger in the past, her grief in the present, she had well-nigh burst into shrieking sobs.

"I think I could drink some tea," said Maria. "Could we not have it together here, for the last time? You will make it, Grace."

Poor, weak, timid heart! Perhaps she only so spoke as an incentive to keep that "peace" for which she tremblingly yearned; which was essential to her, as to all, in her dying hour. George rang the bell and Margery came in.

It was done as she seemed to wish. The small round table was drawn to the fire, and Grace sat at it making the tea. Maria turned her face and asked for Meta. Margery answered that she was coming in by-and-by. Very little was said. George drew a chair near Maria and leaned upon the arm of the sofa. The tea, so far as she went, was a superfluous mockery. George put a teaspoonful in her mouth,

but she with difficulty swallowed it, and shook her head when he would have given her more. It did not seem to be much else than a mockery for the others: Grace's tears dropped into hers, and George suffered his to get cold and then swallowed it at draught, as if it was a relief to get rid of it. Margery was called again to take it away, and Maria, who was lying back on the sofa with closed eyes, asked again for Meta to come in.

Then Margery had to confess that Miss Meta was not at home to come in. She had gone out visiting. The facts of the case were these. Lord Averil after quitting the house had returned to it to say a word to George which he had forgotten, but finding George had gone into his wife's room he would not let him be disturbed. It was just at the moment that Margery had carried out Meta, and the young lady was rather restive at the proceedings, crying loudly.

"What is the grievance, Meta?" asked his lordship.

"The grievance is just this,—that because it's necessary to keep a quiet house to-day she's making it a noisy one," said Margery, explosively. "Twice that I have brought her out of the room she has roared out like this. She can't be in there every moment, fit or unfit, as my lord knows."

Lord Averil looked up at the skies. They were dreary enough, but still not so bad as they had been, and a little bit of blue was struggling forth in the wintry afternoon. "It will not snow again yet," said Lord Averil. "Let me take her up for an hour or two to Ashlydyat. Will you come, Meta, and see Aunt Cecil?"

Meta looked at him, her large eyes full of tears. "Mamma's going to die. I want to stop with her."

"Poor little orphan!" he muttered to himself, stroking her golden curls. "I will bring you back to mamma very soon, Meta," he said, aloud. "She had better come, Margery; it will be a change for her, and keep the house quiet for the time."

Meta, soothed probably by the prom-

ise of being brought back soon, made no opposition, and Margery without the least ceremony took down a woolen shawl and her garden-hat that were hanging on the pegs and enveloped her in them. "They'll do as well as getting out her best things, my lord, if you won't mind 'em: and it'll be dusk a'most by the time you get to Ashlydyat."

It was quite the same to Lord Averil whether the young lady was bundled up as she was now or decked out in a lace frock and crinoline. He led her down the path, talking pleasantly; but Meta's breath was caught up incessantly with sobbing sighs. Her heart was full, imperfect as her idea of the calamity overshadowing her necessarily was.

Thus it happened that Miss Meta was not at hand when Maria asked for her. Whether it was from this, or from causes wholly unconnected with it, in a short while Maria grew restless,—restless, as it seemed, both in body and mind,—and it was deemed advisable that she should not sit up longer.

"Go for Meta while they get me into bed, George," she said to him. "I want her to be near me."

He went out at once; but he did not immediately turn to Ashlydyat. With hasty steps he took the road to Mr. Snow's. There had been a yearning on George Godolphin's mind ever since he first saw his wife in the afternoon, to put the anxious question to one or both of the medical men: "Can nothing be done to prolong her life, even for the shortest space?"

Mr. Snow was out; the surgery boy did not know where. "Paying visits," he supposed. And George turned his steps to Dr. Beale's, who lived now in Prior's Ash, though he had not used to live in it. Dr. Beale's house was ablaze with light, and Dr. Beale was at home, the servant said, but he had a dinner-party.

How the words seemed to grate on his ear! A dinner-party!—gayety, lights, noise, mirth, eating and toast-drinking when his wife was dying!

But the next moment his reflection came to him: the approaching death of a patient is not wont to cast its influence on a physician's private life.

He demanded to see Dr. Beale in spite of the dinner-party. George Godolphin forgot recent occurrences, exacting still the deference paid to him all his life, when Prior's Ash had bowed down to the Godolphins. He was shown into a room, and Dr. Beale came out to him.

But the doctor, though he would willingly have soothed matters to him, could not give him hope. George asked for the truth, and he got it—that his wife's life now might be counted by hours. He went out and proceeded towards Ashlydyat, taking the near way down Crosse Street, by the bank—the bank that once was: it would lead him through the dull Ash-Tree walk with its ghostly story; but what cared George Godolphin?

Did a remembrance of the past come over him as he glanced up at the bank's well-known windows?—a remembrance that pricked him with its sharp sting? He need never have left that house; but for his own recklessness, folly, wickedness—call it what you will—he might have been in it still, one of the honored Godolphins, heir to Ashlydyat, his wife well and happy by his side. Now!—he went striding on with wide steps, and he took off his hat and raised his burning brow to the keen night air. You may leave the house behind you, George Godolphin, and so put it out of your sight, but you cannot put out memory.

Grace had remained with Maria. She was in bed now, but the restlessness seemed to continue. "I want Meta; I want Meta."

"Dear Maria, your husband has but just gone for her," breathed Grace. "But she will soon be here."

It seemed to satisfy her. She lay still, looking upwards, her breath, or Mrs. Akeman fancied it, getting shorter. Grace, hot tears blinding her eyes, bent forward to kiss her wasted cheek.

"Maria, I was very harsh with

you," she whispered. "I feel it now. I can only pray God to forgive me. I loved you always, and when that dreadful trouble came, I felt angry for your sake: I said unkind things to you and of you, but in the depth of my heart there lay the pain and the anger because you suffered. Will you forgive me?"

She raised her feeble hand and laid it lovingly on the cheek of Grace. "There is nothing to forgive, Grace," she murmured: "what are our poor little offences one against the other? Think how much Heaven has to forgive us all. Oh, Grace, I am going to it! I am going away from care."

Grace stood up to dash away her tears; but they came faster and faster. "I would ask you to let me atone to you, Maria," she sobbed, "I would ask you to let me welcome Meta to our home. We are not rich, but we have enough for comfort, and I will try to bring her up a good woman; I will love her as my own child."

"She goes to Cecil." There was no attempt at thanks in words, Maria was growing beyond it; nothing but the fresh touch of the hand's loving pressure. And that relaxed with the next moment and fell upon the bed.

Grace felt somewhat alarmed. She cleared the mist from her eyes and bent them steadily on Maria's face. It seemed to have changed. "Do you feel worse?" she softly asked.

Maria opened her lips, but no sound came from them. She attempted to point with her finger to the door, she then threw her eyes in the same direction; but why or what she wanted it was impossible to tell. Grace, her heart beating wildly, flew across the little hall to the kitchen.

"Oh, Margery, I think she is sinking! Come you and see."

Margery hastened in. Her mistress evidently was sinking, and was conscious of it. The eager, anxious look upon her face and her raised hand proved that she was wanting something.

"Is it my master?—Is it the child?"

cried Margery, bending over her. "They won't be long, ma'am."

It was Margery's habit to soothe the dying, even if she had to do it at some little expense of veracity. She knew that her master could not go to Ashlydyat and be home just yet: she did not know of his visits to the houses of the doctors; but if she had known it she would equally have said, "They won't be long."

But the eager look continued on Maria's face, and it became evident to experienced Margery that her master and Meta were not the anxious point. Maria's lips moved, and Margery bent her ear.

"Papa! Is it time?"

"It's the sacrament she's thinking of," whispered Margery to Mrs. Akeman: "or else that she wants to take her leave of him. The rector was to come at eight o'clock; he told me so when he called in again this afternoon. What is to be done, ma'am?"

"And it is only half-past six! We must send to him at once."

Margery seemed in some uncertainty. "Shall you be afraid to stay here alone, ma'am, if I go?"

"Why! where is Jean?"

Jean, one of the old servants of Ashlydyat, discharged with the rest when the bankruptcy had come, but now in service there again under Lord and Lady Averil, had been with Margery all day. She had now been sent out by the latter for certain errands wanted in the town.

A tremor came over Mrs. Akeman at Margery's question, as to whether she should be afraid to stay there alone. To one not accustomed to it, it does require peculiar courage to remain with the dying. But Grace could call up a brave spirit by dint of will, and she no longer hesitated, when she saw the continued eager look on her sister's face.

"Make you haste, Margery. I shan't mind. Mrs. James is in the house and I can call her if I see a necessity. Margery!"—following her outside the door to whisper it—"do

you see that strange look in her face? Is it *death*?"

She was shaking all over as she spoke, in nervous trepidation. It was to be a memorable night, that, what with one emotion and another, in the memory of Grace Akeman. Margery's answer was characteristic.

"It does look like it, ma'am; but I have seen 'em like this, and then rally again. Anyhow it can't be far off. Mrs. Akeman, it seems to me that all the good ones be leaving the world. First Mr. Godolphin, and now her!"

She had scarcely been gone five minutes when Lord Averil came back with Meta. They had not met George. It was not likely that they had, seeing that he was going to Ashlydyat by a different route. In point of fact, at that moment George was about turning into Crosse Street, passing his old house with those enlivening reminiscences of his. Grace explained why she was alone, and Lord Averil took off his hat and coat to remain.

Maria asked for him. He went up to the bed, and she smiled at him and moved her hand. Lord Averil took it between his, the tears gathering in his earnest eyes as he saw the change in her.

"She has been as happy as possible with us all the evening," he gently said, alluding to the child. "We will do all we can for her always."

"Tell Cecil—to bring—her up—for God."

She must have revived a little or she could not have spoken the words. By-and-by, Margery was heard to enter, and Grace went out to her. The woman was panting with the speed she had made.

"I run on first, ma'am, but the parson is on his way. If you'll please to tell my mistress, I'll make ready for him. Is she as bad now?"

"Scarcely, I think. She has been speaking to Lord Averil. Who's this? Oh, it's Jean."

As the Reverend Mr. Hastings approached the gate he saw a man leaning over it, in the light cast by the

white snow of the winter's night. It was David Jekyl.

"I thought I'd ask how the young missis was, sir, as I went home, but it might be disturbing of 'em to go right up to the door," he said, drawing back to make way for the rector. "It were said in the town, as I came along, that she were worse."

"Yes, David, she is worse,—as ill as she can be. I have just had a message."

David twirled his gray beaver hat awkwardly round on his hand, stroking its napless surface with his other arm. He did not raise his eyes as he spoke to the rector.

"Might be you'd just say a word to her about that money, sir, asking of her not to let it worry her mind. It's said as them things *have* worried her more nor need be. If you could say a word for us, sir, that we don't think of it no more, it might comfort her like."

"The trouble for her has passed, David: to say this to her might bring her thoughts back to it. Heaven is opening to her, earth is closing. Thank you for your thoughtfulness."

The Reverend Mr. Hastings continued his way slowly up the garden-path, whence the snow had been swept away. Illness was upon him and he could not walk quickly. It was a dull night, and yet there was that peculiar light in the atmosphere, often seen when the earth is covered with snow. The door was held open, awaiting him; and the minister uncovered his head, and stepped in with his solemn greeting:

"PEACE BE TO THIS HOUSE, AND TO ALL THAT DWELL IN IT!"

There could be no waiting for George Godolphin: the spirit might be on its wing. They gathered in the room, Grace, and Margery, and Viscount Averil: and, the stillness broken only by the sobs of Grace, Mr. Hastings administered the last rite of our religion to his dying child.

CHAPTER LXXII.

THE LAST.

BREATHE softly, tread gently, for it is the chamber of the dying! The spirit is indeed on its wing, hovering on the very isthmus which separates time from eternity.

A small shaded lamp throws its subdued light upon the room, blending with the more ruddy hue cast by the fire. The white, wan face of Maria Godolphin lies quietly on the not more white pillow,—but that pillow has not the ghastly blue tinge in it which may be seen on the face. Her breath comes in short gasps, and may be heard at a distance; otherwise she is calm and still, the sweet, soft eyes are open yet, and the world and its interests, so far as cognizance goes, has not closed. Meta, in her black frock, dressed as she had been in the day, is lying on the bed by her mother's side; one weak arm is thrown round the child, as if she could not part with her greatest earthly treasure: and George is sitting in a chair on the other side of the bed, his elbow on the pillow, his face turned to catch every shade that may appear on that fading one, so soon to be lost to him forever.

The silence was interrupted by the striking of the house-clock, twelve; and its strokes came through the doors of the room with preternatural loudness in the hushed stillness of the midnight. Margery glided in. Margery and Jean were keeping watch over the fire in the next room—the sitting-room—ready for any services required of them: and they knew that services for the dead as well as for the living would be wanted that night.

The doctors had paid a last visit, superfluous as they knew it to be. Dr. Beale had come with the departure of his dinner-guests,—Mr. Snow earlier in the evening: she was dying, they said, dying quickly,—but calmly and peacefully: and those friends who had wished to take their farewell had taken it ere they left the house, leav-

ing her, as she wished, alone with her husband.

Margery came in with a noiseless step. If Margery had come in once upon the same errand which brought her now, she had come in ten times. Maria turned her eyes towards her.

"She'd be a sight better in bed. It have gone midnight. It can't do no good, her lying there."

Meta partially stirred her golden curls as she moved nearer to her mother, and Maria's feeble hand tightened its clasp on the little one. George nodded: and Margery went back rather in dudgeon, and gave the fire in the next room a fierce poke.

"It's not *wel* to let her see a mortal die. Just you hold your tongue, Jean, about mother and child! Don't I know it's parting them?—but the parting *must* come, and before another hour is over, and I say it would be better to bring her away now. If there should be any thing of a struggle at the last, a fighting for breath, the child will never get it out of her sight. Master has no more sense than a calf, or he'd think of this and send her. Not he! He just gave me one of his looks, as much as to say, 'You be off back; she isn't coming.' 'Tisn't him that would think of it."

"How does she seem now?" asked Jean, a tall woman, with a thin straight-down figure, and old-fashioned, large, white cap.

"I saw no change. There won't be any till the minute comes."

On the table was a tray of cups and saucers. Margery went up to them and drew two from the rest. "We may as well have a drop o' tea now," she said, taking up a small black teapot that was standing on the hob,—for the parlor-grate was an old-fashioned one. "Shall I cut you a bit o' bread-and-butter, Jean!"

"No thank ye. I couldn't eat it."

They sat on either side the table, the teacups between them. Margery put the teapot back on the hob. Jean stirred her tea noiselessly.

"I have known those, as far gone

as she, rally for hours," Jean remarked, in a half-whisper.

Margery shook her head. "She won't rally. It'll be only the working out of my dream. I dreamt last night——"

"Don't get talking of dreams now, Margery," interrupted Jean, with a shiver. "I never like to bring dreams up when the dead be about."

Margery cast a resentful glance at her. "Jean woman, if you have laughed at my dreams once, you have laughed at 'em a hundred times when we lived together at Ashlydyat, ridiculing and saying you never could believe in such things. You know you have."

"No more I don't believe in 'em," said Jean, taking little sips of her hot tea. "But it's not a pleasant subject for to-night."

"It's as pleasant as any other," retorted Margery. "One can't be hivering over dancing and fiddling when there's a poor lady that one has loved dying within earshot. A good mistress she has been to me!—and she'll be a loss to more than one Mark you that Jean."

"The child is to come to the old home, they say, to be brought up by my lady."

Margery grunted. "She'll do her best, no doubt, Miss Cecil will; but the likeliest woman going can't replace a mother. My master, he'll find out her worth and her loss when she is gone."

"I never heard that he didn't know her worth before."

"Didn't you!" retorted Margery. "He's all of a-piece, he is. To think of his keeping that child in there now!"

"Shall we have you at Ashlydyat again, Margery?"

"Now, don't you bother your head about me, Jean woman. Is it a time to cast one's thoughts about and lay out plans? Let the future take care of the future."

Jean remained silent after this rebuff and attended to her tea, which

she could not get of a sufficient coolness to drink comfortably. She had been an inferior servant to Margery at Ashlydyat, in a measure under her control; and she was deferent in manner still. Presently she began again.

"It's a curious complaint that your mistress has died of, Margery,—leastways it has a curious name. I made bold to ask Dr. Beale to-night what it was, when I went to open the gate for him, and he called it—what was it?—atrophy. Atrophy: that was it. They could not at all class the disease of which Mrs. George Godolphin had died, he said, and were content to call it atrophy for want of a better name. I took leave to say that I didn't understand the word, and he explained that it meant a gradual wasting away of the system without apparent cause."

Margery did not reply for the moment. She was swelling with displeasure.

"I'd not speak of a lady as dead, until she was dead, if I were you, Jean Nair!"

"But you know what I mean," said Jean, humbly. "Margery, what is atrophy, for I don't understand it a bit?"

"It's rubbish," flashed Margery—"as applied to my poor, dear mistress. She has died of the trouble—that she couldn't speak of—that has eat into her heart and cankered there—and broke it at last. Atrophy! but them doctors must put a name to every thing. Jean, woman, I have been with her all through it, and I tell you that it's the *trouble* that has killed her. She has had it on all sides, has felt it in more ways than the world gives her credit for. She never opened her lips to me about a thing,—and perhaps it had been better if she had; but I have got my eyes in my head, and I could see what it was doing for her. As I lay down in my clothes on this here sofa last night,—for it wasn't up to my bed I went, with her so ill,—I couldn't help thinking to myself that if she could but have broke the ice and talked of her sorrows they might

have worn off in time. It is the burying the grief within people's own breasts that kills them."

Jean was silent. Margery began turning the grounds in her empty teacup round and round, staring dreamily at the forms they assumed.

"Hark!" cried Jean.

A sound was heard in the next room. Margery started from her chair and softly opened the door. But it was only her master who had gone round the bed and was leaning over Meta. Margery closed the door again.

George had come to the conclusion that the child would be best in bed. Meta was lying perfectly still, looking earnestly at her mamma's face, so soon, so soon to be lost to her. He drew the hiding hair from her brow as he spoke.

"You will be very tired, Meta. I think you must go to bed."

For answer Meta broke into a storm of passionate sobs. It was as if they had been on the burst before and the words had set them on. She flung up her little plump arms and held on to her mother, fearful perhaps of being forced away. Maria turned her eyes imploringly on her husband. Her speech seemed to return to her.

"Don't part us, George. It will be such a little while!"

He went back to his seat. He took his wife's hand in his, he bent his repentant face near to hers: it went to his very heart that she should suppose he wished to *part* them; but some such idea as Margery's had occurred to his mind. Meta's sobs subsided, but they had roused Maria from her passive state of silence.

"Meta—darling,"—came forth the isolated words in the difficulty of her labored breath,—"I am going away, but it is not long before you will come to me. You will be sure to come to me, for God has promised. I seem to have had the promise given to me, to hold it, now, and I shall carry it away with me. I am going to heaven. When the blind was drawn up yesterday morning and I saw the snow, it made me shiver; but I said there will

be no snow in heaven. Meta, there will be only spring there; no sultry heat of summer, no keen winter's cold. Oh, my child, try to come to me, try always! I shall keep a place for you."

The minutes went on,—the spirit fleeting, George watching with his aching heart. Soon she spoke again.

"Has it struck twelve?"

"Ten minutes ago."

"Then it is my birthday. I am twenty-eight to-day. It is young to die!"

Young to die! Yes, it was young to die: but there are some who can count time by sorrow, not by years.

"Don't grieve, George. It will pass so very soon, and you will come to me. Clad in our white robes, we shall rise at the Last Day to eternal life, and be together forever and forever."

The tears were dropping from his eyes. The grief of the present, the anguish of the parting, the remorse for the irrevocable past, in which he might have cherished her more tenderly had he foreseen this, and did not, were all too present to him. He laid his face on hers with a bitter cry.

"Forgive me before you go! Oh, my darling, forgive all!"

There was no answering response, nothing but the feeble pressure of her hand as it held him there, and he started up to look at her. Ah, no,—there could never more be any response from those fading lips, never more, never more.

Was the hour come? George Godolphin's heart beat quicker, and he wildly kissed her with passionate kisses,—as if that would keep within her the life that was ebbing. The loving eyes gazed at him still,—it was he who had the last lingering look, not Meta.

But she was not to die just then,—life was longer in finally departing. George, greedily watching her every breath, praying (who knows?) wild and unavailing prayers to heaven that even yet a miracle might be wrought and she spared to him, supported her

head on his arm. And the minutes went on and on.

Meta was very still. Her sobs had first subsided into a sudden catching of the breath now and then, but that was no longer heard. Maria moved uneasily, or strove to move, and looked up at George in distress,—dying though she was, almost past feeling, the weight of the child's head had grown heavy on her side. He understood and went round to move Meta.

She had fallen asleep. Weary with the hour, the excitement, the still-watching, the sobs, sleep had stolen unconsciously over her,—her wet eyelashes were closed, her breathing was regular, her hot cheeks were crimson. "Shall I take her to Margery?" he whispered.

Maria seemed to look approval, but her eyes followed the child as George raised her in his arms. It was impossible to mistake their yearning wish.

He carried the child round, he gently held her sleeping face to that of his wife, and the dying mother pressed her last feeble kiss upon the unanswering and unconscious lips. Then he took her and gave her to Margery.

The tears were in Maria's eyes when he returned to her, and he bent his face to catch the words that were evidently striving to be spoken.

"Love her always, George."

"Oh, Maria, there is no need to tell it me."

The answer seemed to have burst from him in anguish. There is no doubt that those few last hours had been of the bitterest anguish to George Godolphin: he had never gone through such before; he never would go through such again. It is well,—it is well that these moments can come but once in a lifetime.

He hung over her, suppressing his emotion as he best could for her sake; he wiped the death-dews from her brow, fast gathering there. Her eyes never moved from him, her fingers to the last sought to entwine themselves with his. But soon the loving ex-

pression of those eyes faded into unconsciousness: they were open still, looking as may be said afar off: the recognition of him, her husband, the recollection of earthly things had passed away.

Suddenly there was a movement of the lips, a renewal in a faint degree of strength and energy; and George strove to catch the words. Her voice was dreamy; her eyes looked dreamily at him whom she would never more recognize until they should both have put on immortality.

“And the city has no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God lightens it, and the Lamb is the light——”

Even as she was speaking the last words her voice dropped, and was still. There was no sigh, there was no struggle; had Meta been looking on, the child's pulses would not have been stirred. Very, very gently had the spirit taken its flight.

George Godolphin let his head fall on the pillow beside her. In his overwhelming grief for her? or in repentant prayer for himself? He alone knew. Let us leave it with him!

CHAPTER LXXIII.

OVER THE DEAD.

ONCE more, once more. I cannot help it if you blame me for these things. The death-bell of All Souls' boomed out over Prior's Ash. People were rising in the morning when it struck upon their ear, and they held their breath to listen: three times *two*, and then the quick sharp strokes rung for the recently departed. Then it was for her who was known the previous night to be on the point of death! and they went out of their houses in the bleak winter's morning, and said to each other, as they took down their shutters, that poor Mrs. George Godolphin had really gone at last.

Poor Mrs. George Godolphin! Ay, they could speak of her considerably, kindly, regretfully now, but did they remember how they had once spoken of her? She had gone to the grave with her pain and sorrow, she had gone with the remembrance of their severe judgment, their harsh words, which had eaten into her too sensitive heart: she had gone away from them, to be judged by One who would be more merciful than they had been.

Oh, if we could but be less harsh in judging our fellow-pilgrims! I have told you no idle tale, no false story conjured up by the plausible imagination. Prior's Ash lamented her in a startled sort of manner: their consciences pricked them sorely; and they would have given something to recall her back to life,—now it was too late.

They stared at each other, shutters in hand, stunned as it were, with blank faces and repentant hearts. Somehow they had never believed she would really die; even the day before, when it had been talked of as all too probable, they had not fully believed it; she was young and beautiful, and it is not common for such to go. They recalled her in the several stages of her life: their rector's daughter, the pretty child who had been born and reared among them, the graceful girl who had given her love to George Godolphin, the most attractive man in Prior's Ash; the faithful, modest wife against whose fair fame never a breath of scandal had dared to come; the loving mother, the gentle friend, the kind mistress, the considerate woman,—Prior's Ash looked out around, and in its present mood found none so admirable in all the relations of life as she appeared to have been for whom that bell was tolling.

And how had they requited her? When misfortune, such as does not often fall upon a gentlewoman, overtook her, bursting upon her unconscious head as a hasty-gathered thunder-storm in sultry summer, they had reproached her; had cast towards her their bitter sneers, had not sought to

conceal their unjust reproaches : many a one who had not lost by the bank, who had never had a shilling in it, had sent forth cruel stabs more freely than the rest. Did they think in their heart of hearts that she *deserved* such?—did they think such poisoned arrows could fall harmlessly on a refined, sensitive woman, such as she was?

It was all over now ; she and her broken heart, her wrongs and her sorrows, had been taken from their tender mercies, to a land where neither wrongs nor sorrows can penetrate, where the hearts, broken here by unkindness, are made whole. It was a better change for her ; but Prior's Ash felt it remorsefully. They felt it in a resentful sort of manner when the first shock was over ; as if a wrong had been done to them in her going away so soon, in her not stopping longer, that they in their own fashion might have atoned for their share of the past, had it been but by a single word. This sort of atoning,—or rather the wish to render it,—generally comes too late.

When Meta woke in the morning it was considerably beyond her usual hour, the result probably of her late vigil. Jean was in the room,—not Margery. A moment's surprised stare, and then recollection flashed over her. She darted out of bed, her flushed cheeks and her bright eyes raised to Jean.

"I want mamma."

"Yes, dear," said Jean, evasively. "I'll dress you, and then you shall go down."

"Where's Margery?"

"She has just stepped out on an errand."

Meta paused a moment, looking very hard at Jean. For all her random ways, her high spirits, she inherited very greatly the thoughtful mind, the reflective temperament of her mother ; she had inherited that sensitive reticence of feeling which had so remarkably distinguished George Godolphin's wife. Where Meta's feelings were engaged she was silent, shy

timid as a hare. She possessed of course no definite idea of death. She had seen her baby brother in his coffin, but the sight did not impart any defined notions to her. Had one questioned Meta of that scene, she would have remembered the flowers strewn on the little white shroud, more clearly than any thing else : and when she had gathered, as she had on the previous day, that death was also coming to her mamma, a vague sense of discomfort, of a desire to hold her mamma tightly and not let her go, was the most that her mind had grasped. But the sense of discomfort, of something wrong, returned to her mind when she awoke, the vague fear touching her mother rushed over it with redoubled violence, and she drew away from the hand of Jean, who was about to take hold of her.

"Is mamma in her room? Is she in her bed?"

"We'll go and see presently, dear," repeated Jean, with the same evasion.

The worst way that any one can take is to attempt to deceive a thoughtful, sensitive child, whose fears may be already awakened : it is certain to defeat its own ends. Meta knew as well as Jean did that she was being purposely deceived, that there was something to tell which was not being told. A dread came over Meta that her mamma was in some manner gone out of the house, that she should never see her again : she backed from Jean's hand, dashed the door open, and flew down the stairs. Jean flew after her crying and calling.

The noise surprised George Godolphin. He was in the parlor at the breakfast-table, sitting at the meal but not touching it. The consternation of Prior's Ash was great, but that was as nothing in comparison with his. George Godolphin was as a man bewildered. He could not realize the fact. But four-and-twenty hours since he had received intimation of the danger, and now she was—there. He could not realize it. Though all yesterday afternoon, since

his arrival, he had known there was no hope,—though he had seen her die,—though he had passed the hours since, lamenting her as much as he could do in his first stunned state, yet he could not realize it. He was not casting much blame to himself: he was thinking how circumstances had worked against him and against Maria. His mind was yet in a chaos, and it was from this confused state that the noise outside disturbed him. Opening the door, the sight came full upon his view. The child flying down in her white night-dress, her naked feet scarcely touching the stairs, her eyes wild, her hot cheeks flaming, her golden hair entangled as she had slept.

"I want mamma," she cried, literally springing into his arms as if for refuge. "Papa, I want mamma."

She burst into a storm of sobs distressing to hear; she clung to him with her little arms, her whole frame trembling. George, half-unmanned, sat down before the fire, and pressed her to him in his strong arms.

"Bring a shawl," he said to Jean.

A warm gray shawl of chenille which Maria had often lately worn upon her shoulders was found by Jean, and George wrapped it round Meta as she lay in his arms, and he kept her there. Had Margery been present she would probably have taken the young lady away by force and dressed her with a reprimand; but there was only Jean: and George had it all his own way.

He tried to comfort the grieved spirit,—the little sobbing bosom that beat against his; but his efforts seemed useless, and the child's cry never ceased.

"I want mamma; I want to see mamma."

"Hush, Meta! Mamma,"—George had to pause, himself,—"*mamma's gone. She—*"

The words confirmed all her fears, and she strove to get off his lap in her excitement, interrupting his words. "Let me go and see her, papa! Is she in the grave with Uncle Thomas?"

Oh, let me go and see it! Grand-papa will show it to me."

How long it took to soothe her, even to comparative calmness, George scarcely knew. He learned more of Meta's true nature in that one interview than he had learned in all her life before: and he saw that he must, in that solemn hour, speak to her as he would to a girl of double her years.

"Mamma's gone to heaven, child; she is gone to be an angel with the great God. She would have stayed with us if she could, Meta, but death came and took her. She kissed you,—she kissed you, Meta, with her last breath. You were fast asleep: you fell asleep by her side, and I held you to mamma for her last kiss, and soon after that she died."

Meta had kept still, listening: but now the sobs broke out again.

"Why didn't they wake me and let me see her; why did they take her away first? Oh, papa, though she is dead, I want to see her; I want to see mamma."

He felt inclined to take her into the room. Maria was looking very much like herself; far more so than she had looked in the last days of life: there was nothing ghastly, nothing repulsive, as is too often the case with the dead; the sweet face of life looked scarcely less sweet now.

"Mamma *that was* is there still, Meta," he said, indicating the next room. "The spirit is gone to heaven; you know that: the body, that which you used to call mamma, will be here yet a little while, and then it will be laid by Uncle Thomas, to wait for the resurrection of the Last Day. Meta, if I should live to come home from India; that is if I am in my native land when my time comes to die, they will lay me beside her—"

He stopped abruptly. Meta had lifted her head and was looking at him with a wild questioning expression; as if she could not at first understand or believe his words. "Mamma in there!"

"Yes. But she is dead now, Meta; she is not living."

"Oh, take me to her! Papa, take me to her."

"Listen, Meta. Mamma is changed; she looks cold and white, and her eyes are shut, and she does not stir. I would take you in: but I fear,—I don't know whether you would like to look at her."

But there might be no denial, now that the hope had been given; the child would have broken her heart over it. George Godolphin rose; he pressed the little head upon his shoulder, and carried her to the door, the shawl well wound round her body, her warm feet hanging down. Once in the room, he laid his hand upon the golden curls, to ensure that the face was not raised until he saw fit that it should be, and bore her straight to the head of the bed. Then, holding her in his arms very tightly that she might feel sensibly his protection, he suffered her to look full in the white face lying there.

One glance, and Meta turned and buried her head upon him; he could feel her trembling; and he began to question his own wisdom in bringing her in. Another minute, and she looked back and took a long gaze.

"That's not mamma," she said, bursting into tears.

George sat down on a chair close by, and laid her wet cheek against his, and hid his eyes amidst her curls. His emotion had spent itself in the long night, and he thought he could control it now.

"That is mamma, Meta; your mother and my dear wife. It is all that is left of her. Oh, Meta! if we had but known earlier that she was going to die!"

"It does not look like mamma."

"The moment death comes, the change begins. It has begun in mamma. Do you understand me, Meta? In a few days I shall hear read over her by your grandpapa——" George stopped: it suddenly occurred to him that the Reverend Mr. Hastings would not officiate this time; and he amended his sentence. "I shall hear read over her the words she has,

I know, often read to you; how the corruptible body must die, and be buried in the earth as a grain of wheat is, ere it can be changed and put on immortality."

"Will she never come again?" sobbed Meta.

"Never here, never again. We shall go to her."

Meta sobbed on. "I want mamma! I want mamma that talked to me and nursed me. Mamma loved us."

"Yes, she loved us," he said, his heart wrung with the recollection of the past: "we shall never find any one else to love us as she loved. Meta, child, listen! Mamma lives still; she is looking down from heaven now and sees and hears us; she loves us, and will love us forever. And when our turn shall come to die, I hope—I hope—we shall have learnt all that she has learnt, so that God may take us to her."

It was of no use prolonging the scene: George still questioned his judgment in allowing Meta to enter upon it. But as he rose to carry her away, the child turned her head with a sharp eager motion to take a last look. A last look of the still form, the dead face of her who but yesterday only had been as they were.

Margery had that instant come in and was standing in her bonnet in the sitting-room. To describe her face of surprised consternation when she saw Meta carried out of the chamber would take time and trouble. "You can dress her, Margery," he said, giving the child into her arms.

But for his subdued tones, the evident emotion which lay upon him all too palpably in spite of his efforts to suppress it, Margery might have given her private opinion of the existing state of things. As it was, she confined her anger to dumb show. Jerking Meta to her, with a half fond, half fierce gesture, she lifted her hand in dismay at sight of the naked feet, and turned her own gown up to fling over them.

Scarcely was George left alone when he was again to be disturbed. Some

visitor had softly entered the house, and was being shown in by Jean. A faint flush came over his haggard face—haggard then with its want of sleep and its weight of sorrow—as he saw Mrs. Hastings. Emotion was shaking her also, and she burst into tears as George placed her in a chair.

"I could not get here in time,—I could not get here. Oh, Mr. George, what could have taken her away so suddenly? I had no suspicion she was so very ill."

"It has come more suddenly upon me than upon any one," he answered. "I had no suspicion of it."

"But what has she died of? What complaint had she? I knew of nothing but weakness."

George Godolphin gave no satisfactory answer. He leaned his arm on the elbow of his old-fashioned chair, and his cheek upon his hand. "I would have given my own life to save hers," was all he said.

They sat on in silence, Mrs. Hastings bringing her sobs under control. "How is Mr. Hastings?" he presently asked. "He was ill when he left here last night."

"He is in bed this morning. He is really ill, worse than I have known him for years, and he feels the loss of Maria. Grace feels it also dreadfully, they tell me. It takes a great deal to arouse the feelings of Grace, but when once aroused they are apt to be violent. You see—you see—it has come upon us all so unexpectedly."

George turned to the neglected breakfast-table. "Will you take some?" he asked. "I fear it is cold." He might well say it: his own cup of tea, poured out but never yet tasted, was going on for ice. Mrs. Hastings shook her head and then sat on again, neither feeling at ease in the interview. It was the first time George had been brought face to face with Mrs. Hastings since the summer and its heart-burnings.

It was well, perhaps, that Meta came in to break the awkwardness. Dressed now, in her black frock and white pinafore, her pretty curls combed

smoothly out, her eyes swollen with weeping, her breath catching itself up. Mrs. Hastings drew her to her knee and kissed her.

"Mamma's dead," said Meta, breaking into hysterical sobs.

"Yes, child; yes."

"Margery won't let me say any longer, 'Pray God bless mamma and make her well again.' Why can't I say it?"

The streaming eyes were raised to Mrs. Hastings, the little voice was choking with its emotion. Mrs. Hastings seemed choking also.

"Mamma is well now, Meta. She is gone to be better off. She—she——"

"Margery says she's gone to heaven to be with Uncle Thomas," resumed Meta, breaking the distressed pause.

"So she is."

"Do you think she has thanked Uncle Thomas for the Bible yet?—and told him that I will always read it? I will always read it because mamma bade me."

George drew her towards him; the scene was getting painful for Mrs. Hastings. "Meta must have some breakfast," he whispered, placing her at the table.

But Meta evidently wanted no breakfast that day. Later, when Mrs. Hastings came out of the next room, where she went, she offered to take her home with her to the rectory. "I think it will be better that she should not remain in the house," she said, in an undertone to George. "She will forget her grief, playing with Fanny and Katie Chisholm."

"You are very kind," replied George, and a sharp remembrance darted through him of the cause which had located the little Chisholms at the rectory, "but I expect her to be sent for almost momentarily to Ashlydyat. She is to be there from to-day. I could not well take her out to India with me."

"I heard it was so arranged; and she will have advantages at Ashlydyat which I could not offer: but had you been at a fault for a home, I would have taken her, in spite of——" In

spite of the past, Mrs. Hastings was about thoughtlessly to say, but she stopped in time, and a flush rose to her cheek. "Yes, we would have taken her and done the best we could: she is Maria's child."

He could only repeat a word of acknowledgment, and Mrs. Hastings went out. Margery hastened after her to the gate.

"Did she die quietly, Margery?" Mrs. Hastings asked, the gate in her hand. "Your master is sadly cut up, I can see that, with all his apparent calmness, and I do not like to ask him particulars."

"She died like a lamb, without so much as a sigh," answered Margery. "Master told me so; there was nobody with her but him. As to his being cut up," she added, in a different and slighting tone, "it's only natural he should be."

"What could have killed her? Only this time yesterday I was thinking of her as busy in her preparations for India."

"She have been going right straight on for death ever since that blow in the summer," was Margery's answer. "Looking back, ma'am, and reflecting on it, I seem to see it all, and I wonder I never saw it then. There were troubles of more sorts than one that came upon her together, and I suppose she couldn't battle with them."

Mrs. Hastings sighed deeply as she walked away, thinking how full of care the world was, how unequally lots in it seemed to be dealt out. At the turning of the road she met the close carriage of Lady Averil, with all its badges of rank: its coronet, its servants, its fine horses and their showy harness. Cecil leaned forward and bowed, and Mrs. Hastings rightly conjectured that she was going herself to bring away Meta. "Yes, lots are differently dealt out in life," she murmured: "it is well that Meta should be brought up at Ashlydyat."

It was a somewhat busy week for

George Godolphin, in spite of his sorrow. Many arrangements had to be made: for giving up the apartments; for disposing of personal effects. George's would go with him; Meta's to Ashlydyat; Maria's—what of Maria's? George begged Mrs. Hastings to see to them. Perhaps no bitterer grief had wrung his heart than in the moment when he examined the little cheap trunk, so despised by Charlotte Pain when consigned to that lady's care for safety the previous summer. How good, how pure were her secrets! how great the proof of love and loyalty to him! The bit of hair of their lost children, the two or three love-letters he had written to her; the memorandum made on the day of their engagement: "I was this day engaged to George Godolphin. I pray God to render me worthy of him! to be to him a loving and dutiful wife."

She had been all that; more than all! Had she been less loving, it might perhaps have been better for her. George Godolphin had probably not been the sort of faithful husband that may be set up under a glass-case as a model pattern to delinquent men in general, but he was not dead yet to the sense of right and wrong, or to the impulses of natural affection. He did not much care for the pretty little curls, or for his own love-letters to Maria; but he put that memorandum paper into his pocket-book, together with a lock of hair that had been cut off after death.

Margery's decision would have to be made promptly: whether she should accept Miss Janet's offer of retiring to Scotland and quiet, or go to Ashlydyat to have her life teased out by Miss Meta. Lord Averil threw an inducement into the scale: "When children come to Ashlydyat, Margery, you shall have the ruling of them, as you had of the children at Ashlydyat in the years gone by." Margery answered that she must "turn things about in her mind." And so the days wore on.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

A SAD PARTING.

AGAIN another funeral in All Souls' Church, another opening of the vault of the Godolphins! But it was not All Souls' rector to officiate this time; he stood at the grave with George. Isaac Hastings had come down from London, Harry had come from his tutorship in the school; Lord Averil was again there, and Mr. Crosse had asked to attend.

Prior's Ash had looked out on the funeral, as it had on that of Thomas Godolphin,—at the black hearse with its sable plumes. Some inquisitive ones had solaced their curiosity by taking a private view previously of the coffin at the undertaker's, had counted its nails and studied its plate. Prior's Ash did not make this day into a sort of solemn holiday as it had the other one; no private houses had their blinds drawn, no shops were closed: but people did look out sorrowfully and pityingly as the simple funeral went slowly past. They followed it with their regretful eyes, they said one to another what a sad thing it was for her, only twenty-eight, to die. They forgot that the sadness was left for this world; that she had escaped from it and was free, as a chrysalis casts its shell.

Ay, she had left it behind her, all the sorrow and sadness! she had entered into her rest.

George Godolphin stood over the grave and contrived to maintain an outward calmness, even as his brother Thomas had contrived to maintain it when he had stood in the same churchyard over the burial of Ethel. The two events were not quite analogous perhaps, and Thomas, at any rate, had nothing of remorse on his conscience. He, George, stood motionless, betraying no sign of emotion save that of intense, preternatural stillness: but the eyes of Prior's Ash in the shape of its many idlers were on him, bracing his nerves, steeling his heart. There suddenly arose one

burst of sobs to delight the gaping spectators, but they did not come from him. They came from Harry Hastings.

It drew to an end at last. The men began to shovel the earth on to the coffin as they had shovelled it so short a while before on Thomas Godolphin's, and George turned away. Not yet to the mourning-coach that waited for him, but through the little gate leading to the rectory. He was about to leave Prior's Ash for good that night, and common courtesy demanded that he should say a word of farewell to Mrs. Hastings.

In the darkened drawing-room with Grace and Rose in their new black attire sat Mrs. Hastings. George Godolphin half started back as they rose to greet him. He did not stay to sit; he stood by the fire-place, his hat in his hand, its flowing crape nearly touching the ground.

"I will say good-by to you now, Mrs. Hastings."

"You really leave to-night?"

"By the seven-o'clock train. Will you permit me to express my hope that a brighter time may yet dawn for you,—to assure you that no effort on my part shall be spared to conduce to it."

He spoke in a low, quiet, meaning tone, and he held her hand between his. Mrs. Hastings could not misunderstand him, that he was hinting at a hope of reimbursing somewhat of their pecuniary loss.

"Thank you for your good wishes," she said, keeping down the tears. "You will allow me,—you will speak to Lady Averil to allow me to have the child here for a day sometimes?"

"Need you ask it?" he answered, a generous warmth in his tone. "Cecil, I am quite sure, recognizes your right in the child at least in an equal degree with her own, and is glad to recognize it. Fare you well; fare you well, dear Mrs. Hastings."

He went out, shaking hands with Grace and Rose as he passed, thinking how much he had always liked Mrs. Hastings, with her courteous manners and gentle voice, so like those of his

lost wife. The rector met him in the passage, and George held out his hand.

"I shall not see you again, sir. I leave to-night."

The rector took the hand. "I wish you a safe voyage," he said. "I hope things will be more prosperous with you in India than they have been latterly here."

"We have all need to wish that," was George's answer. "Mr. Hastings, promises from me might be regarded as valueless; but this much I wish to say ere we part,—that I carry the weight of my debt to you about me, and I will lessen it should it be in my power. You will"—dropping his voice—"you will see that the inscription is properly placed on the tombstone."

"I will. Have you given orders for it?"

"Oh, yes. Farewell, sir. Farewell, Harry," he added, as the two sons came in. "Isaac, I shall see you in London."

He passed swiftly out to the mourning-coach and was driven home. Above every thing on earth George hated this leave-taking: but there were two or three to whom it had to be spoken.

Not until the dusk did he go up to Ashlydyat. He called in at Lady Godolphin's Folly as he passed; she was his father's widow, and Bessy was there. My lady was very cool. My lady told him that it was his place to give the refusal of Meta to her, and she should never forgive the slight. From the very moment she heard that Maria's life was in danger, she had made up her mind to break through her rules of keeping children at a distance and to take the child. She should have reared her in every luxury as Miss Godolphin of Ashlydyat, and left her a handsome fortune: as it was, she washed her hands of her. George thanked her for her good intention as a matter of course, but his heart leaped within him at the thought that Meta was safe and secure with Cecil. He would have taken her and Margery out to make acquaintance with the elephants rather than have left Meta to Lady Godolphin.

"She'll get over the smart, George," whispered Bessy, as she came out to bid him God-speed. "I shall be having the child here sometimes, you know. My lady's all talk: she never cherishes resentment long."

He entered the old home, Ashlydyat, and was left alone with Meta at his own request. She was in the deepest black: crape tucks on her short frock; not a bit of white to be seen about her save her socks and the tips of her drawers; and Cecil had bought her a jet necklace of round beads, with a little black cross hanging from it on her neck. George sat down and took her on his knee. What with the drawn blinds and the growing twilight the room was nearly dark, and he had to look closely at the little face turned to him. She was very quiet, rather pale, as if she had grieved a good deal in the last few days.

"Meta," he began, and then he stopped to clear his husky voice—"Meta, I am going away."

She made no answer. She buried her face upon him and began to cry softly. It was no news to her, for Cecil had talked to her the previous night. But she clasped her arms tightly round him as if she could not let him go, and began to tremble.

"Meta! my child!"

"I want mamma!" burst from the little full heart. "I want mamma to be with me again. Is she gone away forever? Is she put down in the grave with Uncle Thomas? Oh, papa! I want to see her!"

A moment's struggle with himself, and then George Godolphin gave way to the emotion which he had so successfully restrained in the church-yard. They sobbed together, the father and child: her face against his, the sobs bursting freely from his bosom. He let them come—loud, passionate, bitter sobs—unchecked, unsubdued. Do not despise him for it. They are not the worst men who can thus give way to the vehemence of our common nature.

It spent itself after a time; such emotion must spend itself: but it could

not wholly pass yet. Meta was the first to speak, the same vain wish breaking from her, the same cry.

"I want mamma! Why did she go away forever?"

"Not forever, Meta. Only for a time. Oh, child, we shall go to her,—we shall go to her in a little while. Mamma's gone to be an angel,—to keep a place for us in heaven."

"How long will it be?"

"Not a moment of our lives but it will draw nearer and nearer. Meta, it may be well for us that those we love should go on first, or we might never care to go thither of ourselves."

She lay more quietly. George laid his hand upon her head, unconsciously playing with her golden hair, his tears dropping on it.

"You must think of mamma always, Meta. Think that she is looking down at you, on all you do, and try and please her. She was very good; and you must be good, making ready to go to her."

A renewed burst of sobs came from the child. George waited, and then resumed.

"When I come back,—if I live to come back,—or when you come to me in India,—at any rate when I see you again, Meta, you will probably be grown up,—no longer a child, but a young lady. If I shall only find you like mamma was in all things, I shall be happy. Do you understand, darling?"

"Yes," she sobbed.

"Good, and gentle, and kind, and lady-like,—and remembering always that there's another world, and that mamma has gone on to it. I should like to have kept you with me, Meta, but it cannot be: I must go out alone. You will not quite forget me, will you?"

She put up her hand and her face to his, and moaned in her pain. George laid his aching brow on hers. He knew that it might be the last time they should meet on earth.

"I shall write to you by every mail, Meta, and you must write to me. You can put great capital letters together now, and that will do to begin with. And," his voice faltered, "whea

you walk by mamma's grave on Sundays—and see her name there—you will remember her—and me. You will think how we are separated,—mamma, in heaven; I, in a far-off land; you, here,—but you know the separation will not be forever, and each week will bring us nearer to its close,—its close in some way. If— if we never meet on earth again, Meta—"

"Oh, don't, papa! I want you to come back to me."

He choked down his emotion. He took the little face in his hands and kissed it fervently,—in that moment, in his wrung feelings, he almost wished he had had no beloved child to abandon.

"You must be called by your own name now. I should wish it. Meta was all very well," he continued, half to himself, "when she was here; that the names should not clash. Be a good child, my darling. Be very obedient to Aunt Cecil, as you used to be to mamma."

"Aunt Cecil is not mamma," said Meta, her little heart swelling.

"No, my darling, but she will be to you as mamma, and she and Lord Averil will love you very much. I wish, I wish I could have kept you with me, Meta!"

She wished it also. If ever a child knew what an aching heart was, she knew it then.

"And now I must go," he added,—for indeed he did not care to prolong the pain. "I shall write to you from London, Meta, and I shall write you quite a packet when I am on board ship. You must get on well with your writing, so as to be able soon to read my letters yourself. Farewell, farewell, my darling child!"

How long she clung to him, how long he kept her clinging, he paid no heed. When the emotion on both sides was spent, he took her by the hand and led her to the next room. Lady Averil came forward.

"Cecil," he said, his voice quiet and subdued, "she must be called Maria now, in remembrance of her mother."

"Yes," said Cecil, eagerly. "We should all like it. Sit down, George. Lord Averil has stepped out somewhere, but he will not be long."

"I cannot stay. I shall see him outside, I dare say. If not, he will come to the station. Will you say to him——"

A low burst of tears from the child interrupted the sentence. George, in speaking to Cecil, had loosed her hand, and she laid her head down on a sofa to cry. He took her up in his arms, and she clung to him tightly,—it was only the old scene over again, and George felt that they were not alone now. He imprinted a last kiss upon her face, and gave her to his sister.

"She had better be taken away, Cecil."

Lady Averil, with many loving words, carried her outside the door, sobbing as she was, and called to her maid. "Be very kind to her," she whispered. "It is a sad parting. And—Harriet—henceforth she is to be called by her proper name, Maria."

"She will overget it in a day or two, George," said Lady Averil, returning.

"Yes, I know that," he answered, his face turned from Cecil. "Cherish the remembrance of her mother within her as much as you possibly can, Cecil: I should wish her to grow up like Maria."

"If you would but stay a last hour with us!"

"I can't, I can't; it is best that I should go. I do not know what the future may bring forth," he lingered to say. "Whether I shall come home, or live to come home; or she, when she is older, come out to me; it is all uncertain."

"Were I you, George, I would not indulge the thought of the latter. She will be better here,—as it seems to me."

"Yes, there's no doubt of it. But the separation is a cruel one. However, the future must be left. God bless you, Cecil! and thank you, thank you ever for your kindness."

The tears rolled down her cheeks as he bent to kiss her. "George," she

whispered timidly, "if I might but ask you one question."

"Ask me any thing."

"Is—have you any intention—shall you be likely to think of—of replacing Maria by Charlotte Pain—of making her your wife?"

"Replacing *Maria* by *her*!" he echoed, his face flushing. "Heaven forgive you for thinking it!"

The question cured George's present emotion more effectually than any thing else could have done. But his haughty anger against Cecil was unreasonable, and he felt that it was.

"Forgive me, my dear: but it sounded so like an insult to my dear wife. Be easy: *she* will never replace Maria."

In the porch, as George went out, he met Lord Averil hastening in. Lord Averil would have put his arm within George's to walk with him through the grounds, but George drew back.

"No, not to night,—let me go alone. I am not fit for companionship. Good-night. Good-by," he added, his voice hoarse. "I thought to say a word of gratitude to you, for the past, for the present, but I cannot. If I live——"

"Don't say 'if,' George. Go away with a good heart, and take my best wishes with you. A new land and a new life! you may live the past down yet."

Their hands lingered together in a firm pressure, and George turned away from Ashlydyat for the last time,—Ashlydyat that might have been his.

There was Margery yet: and he had one or two final things to say to her,—arrangements to make. The apartments were to be given up on the morrow, and Margery would then take up her abode at Ashlydyat; for it was there she had elected to remain. She *could* not give up her darling, her bereaved darling, who in Margery's opinion would be trebly an orphan if she also deserted her; and it appeared likely that there would not in future be so indulged a damsel in all the county as Miss Maria Godolphin.

CHAPTER LXXV.

A SAFE VOYAGE TO HIM!

Was it ever your fate or fortune to be aboard an Indian vessel when it was just on the start? If so, there's no doubt you retain a more vivid than agreeable remembrance of the reigning confusion. Passengers coming on at the last moment, and going frantic over their luggage or the discovered inconveniences of their cabins; cords and ropes creaking and coiling; sailors shouting, officers commanding; boxes shooting up from the boats on to the deck, and to your feet, only in turn to be shot down again to the hold! It is Bedlam gone frantic and nothing less.

On a fine ship, anchored off Gravesend, this scene was taking place on a crisp day in early January. A bright, inspiriting, sunny day, giving earnest—if there's any thing in the popular belief—of a bright voyage. One gentleman stood aloof from the general melee. He had been on board half an hour or more; had seen to his cabin, his berth, his baggage,—so much of the latter as he could see to; and now stood alone watching the turmoil. Others,—passengers,—had come on board in groups, surrounded by hosts of friends; he came alone: a tall and very distinguished-looking man, attired in the deepest mourning, with a gray plaid crossed on his shoulder.

As if jealous that the ship should have all the confusion to itself, the shore was getting up a little on its own account. Amidst the drays, the trucks, the carts; amidst the cases and packages which were heaped on the bank,—not all, it was to be hoped, for that ship, or she'd never get off to-day; amidst the numerous crowds of living beings, idlers and workers, that such a scene brings together, there came something dashing into the very throng of them, scattering every thing that could be scattered, right and left.

An exceedingly remarkable carriage, of the style that may be called "dashing," especially if height be any criterion,—its wheels red and green,

its horses of high mettle, and a couple of fierce dogs barking and leaping round it. The scattered people looked up in astonishment to see a lady guiding those horses, and deemed at first the gleaming sun, shining right into their eyes, had deceived them: pawing, snorting, prancing, fiery animals; which, far from being spent by their ten or twelve-mile journey, looked as if they were eager to start upon another. The lady managed them admirably: a very handsome lady was she, of the same style as the carriage, dashing, with jet-black eyes, large and free, and a scarlet feather in her hat that might have been found thirty-six inches long, had it been measured from top to tip. A quiet little gentleman, slight and fair, sat beside her, and a groom lounged grandly with folded arms in the back seat. She, on her high cushions, was a good yard above either of them; the little gentleman in fact was completely eclipsed: and she held the reins in her white gauntleted hands and played gallantly with the whip perfectly at ease, conscious that she was those foaming steeds' master. Suddenly, without the least warning, she drew them back on their haunches.

"There she is! in the middle of the stream. Can't you read it, Dolf? *The Indus*. How stupid of the people to tell us she was lying lower down!"

Jumping from the carriage without waiting to be assisted, she left the groom in charge and made her way to the pier, condescendingly taking the gentleman's arm as she hastened up it, and hissing off the dogs as a hint that they were to remain behind. I am sure you cannot need an introduction to either of these people, but you shall have it, for all that: Mr. and Mrs. Rodolf Pain.

She, Charlotte, did all the acting, and talking too. Her husband had always been of retiring manners, as you may remember; and he had now grown far more retiring than he used to be. Charlotte made the bargain for a boat: they got into it, and were pulled to the ship's side.

For a few moments they had to take their chance: they made only two more in the universal confusion: but Charlotte caught hold of a handsome young man with a gold band upon his cap, who was shouting out orders.

"Can you tell me whether Mr. George Godolphin has come on board yet?"

"Mr. George Godolphin," repeated the young officer, cutting short some directions midway, and looking half bewildered in the general disorder.

"A first-class passenger, bound for Calcutta," explained Charlotte.

"I can inquire. Tymms," beckoning to him one of the middies, "go and ask the steward whether a gentleman of the name of Godolphin has come down."

But there was no need of further search. Charlotte's restless eyes had caught sight of George,—the solitary passenger in mourning whom you saw standing alone. She and Mr. Pain made the best of their way to him, over the impediments blocking up the deck.

He did not see their approach. He was leaning over the side of the ship on the opposite side to that facing the shore, and Charlotte gave him a smart rap on the arm with her gauntlet-glove.

"Now, Mr. George Godolphin! what do you say for your manners?"

He turned quickly, his face flushing slightly with surprise when he saw them standing there: and he shook hands with them both.

"I ask what you have to say for your manners, Mr. George? The very idea of your leaving England for good, and never calling to say good-by to us!"

"I met Mr. Pain a day or two ago," said George. "He——"

"Met Mr. Pain! what on earth if you did?" interrupted Charlotte. "Mr. Pain's not me. You might have found time to dine with us. I have a great mind to quarrel with you, George Godolphin, by way of a leave-taking."

Something like a smile crossed George's lips. "The fact is, I thought

I might have seen you at the Verralls', Mrs. Pain. I went there for half an hour yesterday. I charged Mrs. Verrall——"

"Rubbish!" retorted Charlotte. "When you must have known we had moved into a house at Shooter's Hill you could not suppose we were still at the Verralls'. Our catching you this morning here was a mere chance. We stayed late in town yesterday afternoon at the furniture-warehouse, and, in driving back down the Strand, saw Isaac Hastings, so I pulled up to ask what had become of you, and whether you were dead or alive. He informed us you were to sail to-day from Gravesend, and I told Dolf I should drive down. But it is ill-mannered of you, Mr. George."

"You will readily understand, that since my last return from Prior's Ash, I have not felt inclined for visiting," he said, in a low, grave tone, unconsciously glancing at his black attire. "I intended you no discourtesy, Mrs. Pain: but for one thing, I did not know where you might be met with."

"And couldn't find out!" retorted Charlotte. "Dolf could have given you the address I suppose the other day, had you asked. He's too great a fool to think to give it of his own accord."

George looked at "Dolf," whom his wife seemed so completely to ignore,—looked at him with a pleasant smile, as if he would atone for Charlotte's rudeness. "We were not together a minute, were we, Mr. Pain? I was in a hurry, and you seemed in one."

"Don't say any more about it, Mr. Godolphin," spoke Dolf, as resentfully as he dared. "That's just like her!—making a fuss over nothing! Of course you could not be expected to visit at such a time: and anybody but Charlotte would have the good feeling to see it. I am pleased to be able to see you here and wish you a pleasant voyage; but I remonstrated with her this morning, that it was scarcely the right thing to intrude upon you. But she never listens, you know."

"You needn't have come," snapped Charlotte.

"And then you would have gone on at me about my ill-manners, as you have to Mr. Godolphin! One never knows how to please you, Charlotte."

George resumed,—to break the silence possibly, more than with any other motive: "Have you settled at Shooter's Hill?"

"Settled!" shrieked Charlotte, "settled at Shooter's Hill!—where it's ten miles, good, from any theatre or other place of amusement? No, thank you. A friend of Verrall's had this place to let for a few weeks, and Dolf was idiot enough to take it——"

"You consented first, Charlotte," interrupted poor Dolf.

"Which I never should have done had I reflected on the bother of getting up to town," said Charlotte, equably. "Settled at Shooter's Hill! I'd as soon do as you are going to do, Mr George,—bury myself alive in Calcutta. We have taken on lease a charming house in Belgravia, and shall enter on a succession of dinner-parties: one a week we think of giving during the season. We shall not get into it much before February: it takes some time to choose furniture."

"I hate dinner-parties," said Dolf, ruefully.

"You are not obliged to appear at them," said Charlotte, with much graciousness. "I can get your place filled at table, I dare say. What is that noise and scuffling?"

"They are heaving the anchor," replied George. "We shall soon be on the move."

"I hear great alterations are being made at Ashlydyat," remarked Charlotte.

"Only on the spot called the Dark Plain. The archway is taken down and a summer-house being built on the site,—an extensive sort of summer-house, for it is to contain three or four rooms, I believe: it will have a fine view."

"And what of those ugly gorse-bushes?"

"They will be cleared away, and the place laid out as a pleasure-garden."

"Is my lady staring it at the Folly?"

"Scarcely,—just now," quietly answered George.

"Miss Godolphin has gone to Scotland, I hear."

"Yes. Bessy will reside with Lady Godolphin."

"And tart Margery? What has become of her?"

"She remains with Maria at Ashlydyat."

Charlotte opened her eyes,—Charlotte had a habit of opening them when puzzled or surprised. "Maria! Who is Maria?"

"The child. We call her by her proper name now."

"Oh, by the way, I nearly forgot it," returned Charlotte, in the old good-natured tone: for, it may be remarked, that during the interview her tone had been what she had just called Margery,—tart. "I should like to have the child up on a visit when we get into our house, and astonish her mind with the wonders of London. I suppose Lady Averil will make no objection?"

A very perceptible flush, red and haughty, dyed the face of George Godolphin. "You are very kind to think of it, Mrs. Pain; but I fear Lady Averil would not consent. Indeed, I have desired that the child may not visit, except amidst her immediate relatives."

"As you please," said Charlotte, resentfully. "Dolf, I think we may as well be moving. I only meant it as a kindness to the child."

"And I thank you for it," said George, in a warm tone. "For all the kindness you have shown her, Mrs. Pain, I thank you sincerely and heartily. Take care!"

He interposed to prevent a great rope, that was being borne along, from touching her. Charlotte began in earnest to think it was time to move, unless she would be carried down the river in the ship.

"When shall you come back?" she asked him.

He shook his head. He could not tell any more than she could. The future was all indistinct.

"Well, you won't forget to find us

out, whenever you do come," returned Charlotte.

"Certainly not. Thank you."

"Do you know," cried Charlotte, impulsively, "you are strangely different in manners, George Godolphin! They have grown as cold and formal as a block of ice. Haven't they, Dolf?"

"If they have, it's your fault," was the satisfactory answer of Dolf. "You keep firing off such a heap of personal questions, Charlotte. I see no difference in Mr. Godolphin: but he has had a good deal of trouble, you know."

"Shall we ever hear of you?" continued Charlotte, pushing back Dolf with her elbow, and completely eclipsing his meek face with her swinging scarlet feather.

"No doubt you will, Mrs. Pain, through one or another. Not that I shall be a voluminous correspondent with England, I expect: except, perhaps, with Ashlydyat."

"Well, fare you well, George," she said, holding out both her gauntleted hands. "You seem rather cranky this morning, but I forgive you: it is trying to the spirits to leave one's native place for good and all. I wish you all good luck with my best heart!"

"Thank you," he said, taking the hands within his own and shaking them; "thank you always. Good-by. Good-by, Mr. Pain."

Mr. Pain shook hands in a less demonstrative manner than his wife, and his leave-taking, if quiet, was not less sincere. George piloted them to the gangway, and saw them pulled ashore in the little boat.

They ascended to the carriage, which by all appearance had been keeping up a perpetual dance of commotion since they left it, the fault probably of its horses and its dogs: and Charlotte, taking her high seat, dashed away in style, her whip flour-

ishing, the dogs barking, her red feather tossing and gleaming. What she'll do when these feathers go out of fashion it's hard to say: Charlotte could hardly stir out without one.

And by-and-by, the anchor up, the tug attached, the good ship *Indus* was fairly on her way, being towed smoothly down the Channel under the command of her pilot. The passengers were tormenting themselves still: the sailors seemed to be perpetually hurrying hither and thither, the steward was in a tumult; but George Godolphin, wrapped in his gray plaid, remained in his place, quiet and still, gazing out over the bows of the vessel. What were his reflections, as his native land began to recede from his eyes? Did he regret it? Did he regret the position he had lost; the ruin he had wrought; the death of his wife? Did he finally regret the inevitable PAST, with all its mistakes and sins?—and think that if it could but come over again, he would act differently? Possibly so. Once he lifted his hat, and pushed the golden hair farther from his brow, from his handsome face, not less bright or handsome than of yore,—save in its expression. In that, there was an unmistakable look of weary sadness, never before seen on the features of gay George Godolphin.

And when, hours after, the rest of the cabin passengers were summoned to dinner, he never stirred, but kept his place there, looking out into the dusky night, glancing up at the stars that came glittering out in the blue canopy of heaven.

A safe landing to him on the shores of Calcutta! A safe and sure landing on a different shore that must come after it!

And Mr. and Mrs. Pain's dinner-parties in Belgravia are a great success.

THE END.

THE SHADOW OF ASHLYDYAT.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD.

AUTHOR OF "VERNER'S PRIDE," "THE CASTLE'S HEIR," "THE EARL'S HEIRS,"
"EAST LYNNE," "CHANNINGS," "THE MYSTERY," "A LIFE'S SECRET,"
"SQUIRE TREVLYN'S HEIR," "THE RUNAWAY MATCH," ETC., ETC.

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